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CAPTAIN HERBERT.

CAPTAIN HERBERT

A Sea Story.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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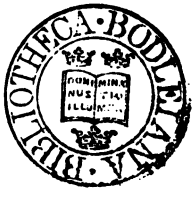
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CAPTAIN HERBERT.

CHAPTER I.

MR. ETHEREGE *CHEZ LUI*, OR "AT EASE IN HIS INN."

THE past summer had not been so dull in busy Bristol or pleasant Somersetshire, as it was with the frigate *Astræa* at sea. Though the Atlantic was monotonous for the time—British commerce was not really ruined at home, nor the woods bare, the fields idle, the brooks silent, the villages and rural Halls unsocial; so that the Spencers came and went, and were even very cheerful and gay. Even for Etherege, with London to fly to, or growing opportunities of Arcadian change in the hospitable country, his commodious inn of the *New Cannynges Arms* was by no means wearisome. With whatever uncertainty his movements might come to rest there, or his return thither be depended upon by

his Bristol acquaintances, his presence seemed always the signal for gaiety round the Hotwells—for a *fête champêtre* somewhere, through Mrs. Beauchamp of the Cliff, or some one else's *pic-nic à la Watteau*, or an archery meeting or reunion *al fresco*, at which Lady Die could appear on equal terms with that splendid dowager widow. His tastes were being acclimatised; he seemed to have taken up, with a peculiar freshness of zest, the spirit of English club-life, and the English sense of comfort to be realised in an English inn. To explain any apparent restlessness in his use of it, no charge of eccentricity was required; it was obvious enough how his conduct in this point became regulated between the attractions of Beech Grove and the parental wishes there. His suit to the hand of the youngest Miss Spencer was known to all, and its success inferred by most; whatever else he had had in view, it was all being swallowed up in this sudden devotion; he would evidently have staid in Bristol from summer till summer again, if love must needs delay so long. But the "fair" was in her earlier teens; she had a fortune of her own; her own choice was certain to be as free as parents like Mr. and Mrs. Spencer could make it; and as is the case with young belles, independent heiresses, and indulged children, she was wilful to a fault. The merchant's decided conditions were known also: that the lover must be judicious in his course for the present, not over-

impatient or marked in his addresses, and temperate in the frequency of his presence. Broadby and Co. were not less confirmed in their solidity that summer, than Mr. Spencer was reinvigorated as to his resoluteness of character; hence, therefore, the unsettled periods of Mr. Etherege's stay at his inn, since it was plain to those who knew him best, that absence was often easier to his temperament than coolness or patience.

Etherege returned early one summer evening from Beech Grove, riding slowly down into the city, with slack rein and stooped head—the conspicuous figure of absorbed though passionate thought: in his recent disuse of the more private and imposing equipage he had at first kept, there was indicated only another proof of adopted English habits, and of accommodation to the manners around him. He dismounted before entering the streets, and gave his horse to the servant who had ridden behind, to be taken forward to the inn while he strolled homeward by a route still quieter: not that his horsemanship was in the least timid, or awkward marked in its peculiar cast [originally acquired in travel among the Bedouins of the Nile]; his easy grace and natural advantages being sufficient, indeed, to have set off the plainest cob that had passed him. His real knowledge was evident, not merely from the blood, bone, spirit and beauty of the animal thus led off, but in the soberer paces

required for that of the groom—his somewhat phlegmatic body-servant, Jacques, who now alone fulfilled the restricted necessities of the master. Versatile enough, attached, and tractable, Jacques had been but his Swiss valet previously, yet served the turn now; pleasantly allowing himself to become '*Jack*' at the inn stables, or in that of Beech Grove: nevertheless, Jacques had ears so largely protruded, eyes so pig-like in their small twinkle from a bony cheek, as scarce to consist with the unobservant, unimaginative, unsentimental air he bore. From the placid deportment of Jacques, it could hardly have been supposed that he ever persisted in talking magnificently of Mr. Etherege and his affairs, as "His Excellency the Comte de St. Amand"—that he still exalted and yet professed to under-value those of the Spencers—and was still not nicely careful of his own person. However good as a valet, however gallant to the cook at Beech Grove—being at the same time questionable as to his moral integrity in regard of articles of dress or in pecuniary matters—he was, in a word, altogether inconvertible as "a *foreigner*;" so that his master, who when last in London had confessedly expected some one in his place, did not attempt to conceal that Jacques was retained for the present merely.

"Jacques," it had now been said in French by Mr. Etherege, "you will lose no time in your re-

turn to the inn; you will at once begin packing up what is necessary for a brief visit to London—*your own* property as a whole, observe. As I said, I shall there leave you—assisting you either to find a new engagement, or to regain whatever part of the Continent may suit your views."

"Monsieur has at last ascertained, then," had been the thoughtful reply, "that my successor has arrived at London."

"Some days ago—yes, Jacques, it was so," his master had said, rather reluctantly, but smiling perforce; so un-English, probably, did this way of taking it now seem to him—"the letter reached me then, but I still thought of retaining you; it is impossible, however. Adolphe *must* be provided for—your qualities can command employment. *His* silence, at least, is certain—as for his other requisites, I can compel them. Adolphe is a slave, M. Jacques—a slave who would not think of claiming English liberty, were I capable of opposing the demand."

The Swiss, as he took the horse's bridle, had shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace, while he raised his hat to go. "In that case, certainly, M. le Comte de St. Amand," said he, "it would have been out of the question that I should serve in—in the same establishment. The address of the letter struck me, I confess, monsieur—it smelt of a *vessel*, and at the same time of palm-oil on the

skin, of tropical cargoes at hand; the sealing-wax had melted on it, indeed, but the handwriting occurred to me as being more than ordinarily obsequious."

"Besides, my good fellow," Etherege had added, with a decidedly British tendency to laugh outright, "I really had no need of two attendants—for the present."

"Since it is not from *economy* that monsieur parts with me," persisted the valet, recovering all his politest good will, "there will not be the slightest difficulty in securing at London, with the influence of monsieur, a fresh post of similar distinction. It might be permitted, perhaps, that, with a view to eventualities, the card of my address may be left with monsieur? As to my native Europe—*no!*—allow me to decline it for the present. True, at any point of the Continent I should feel myself at home—but—yes, I only venture to imitate monsieur in a preference for this island. The conscription is said to be rigid. I have formed no enmities here, even in this odious Breest*ole!*" Wherewith Jacques clasped Mr. Etherege's bridle to his heart in all sincerity.

"As you will; we go to-morrow," said his master, turning away. "The horses, of course, will remain behind us."

It could not merely be to escape notice from Jacques, or from other eyes in the scattered

suburbs, that he loitered past odorous gardens on the way, and hung apart over the bridge of some small canal; watching the liquid reflections as they faded in the long sultry twilight, hearing the chatter of merry voices as they tended home, courting the sweet hush that came upon children's playful cries. There was nothing to hide from a stray passenger; he did nothing different then, when alone,—he said nothing whatever to disclose his mind. He reached the *Cannynges Arms* in the end, only like one who had been loth to be sooner shut from the late beauties of the sunset, from the full lustre and tenderness of the harvest-moon that washed them out. Seated within, while Jacques was busily packing up, while the liveried inn waiter came and went,—even when left musingly to himself at last, Etherege did not show his thoughts; he uttered no soliloquy, no significant "asides" broke from him as if he had been a mysterious hero or dark conspirator, in whose bosom a conflict raged. With a cup of coffee by, and a silver toast-rack near (on which it is true he made but slight requisition), he drew an open travelling-escritoire before him, and wrote in French the following letter to a Parisian friend. The letter itself—found amongst other papers of the young and brave French officer in question, after his death at the British capture of Charlestown, South Carolina, U.S. — luckily fills a blank that might have been felt here:

" At the Inn of the New Cannynges Arms,
Lower Brandon-street, Bristol, August 18th, 1778.

"It is now, my dear Florian—*now* of all moments! that thou again invitest me to rejoin thee, on the very eve of an expedition in whose enthusiasm I must, for the second time, remind thee that I never participated. Thou still indulgest the wish, the hope, as thou so flatteringly entitlest it, that I may even be induced at the last glance to share in the adventure; planned this time on no trifling scale, certainly, and now openly acknowledged; headed by officers more experienced than M. de Lafayette, and guarded by a royal fleet like that under the distinguished charge of M. le Comte d'Estaing. Thou build'st this hope on the slight maritime experience, the mere juvenile skill in tropical pleasure-sailing and navigation, the very local knowledge, of which thy friend Etienne, surely, seldom boasted—which, in reality, have to a great extent faded. Thou think'st these, with thy own warm solicitations to M. de Sartines, would ensure a commission of no subordinate rank; thou hold'st out a strong temptation beyond, which might doubtless be verified ere long, since I at least trust there would be no failure of courage in supporting the honour. It is needless, thou say'st, to invite me back to the usual gaieties of Paris, which are *effete*—which no one regrets in the universal longing to save and assist De La-

fayette, to inspire M. Washington with ideas, to liberate our American brothers, to vindicate the noble Indians, to deliver the oppressed Africans, who all unite like the globe itself to expect us. Thou thyself, along with Paris, art sick of philosophy, thou smil'st at love, and run'st wild at the desire for glory; thy charming dancer of the *Comédie Française* charms thee no longer, just as thy tragic *Elmire* ceased before to distract thee; but, at all events, neither Paris nor thou hast given up friendship! Friendship is more than ever prized—thou swear'st that having before merely felt its delight, its transports, thou now ador'st it! Thou almost reproach'st me—thou mak'st it the test of my former sincerity, of my present recollections, that I remain here or meet thee there! Nay, while proving the value of such a possession here, in absence, in solitude, amidst emotions to which a confidant, a brother, yes, a friend, is indescribably necessary—writing far oftener than thou, if in some respects less candidly —*I* am blamed for the very reserve which it was impossible to break without egotism, without risking the loss of a friend so spirited, of a correspondent so vivacious, so averse to tedious details!

"Ah, my friend, when friendship commences to be adored, let me ask, is it not on the point to become—like the filial dream of which priests have

taken advantage—a mere name, a powerless etiquette? So far from adoring it, so far from even beginning to implore it, it shall cease for me when my Florian offers a temple instead of mutual confidence. I have already sent him sufficient indications of the reason why Paris becomes impossible to me. Friendship, unlike passion, does not always demand proximity; and besides—unless it forced my combination, for the sake of a bribe already *due* by justice—in Paris it seems I should soon be absent from both objects. This letter may even not find its destination in time; so uncertain are the posts now, that it may have to be forwarded by sea to the fleet, or to America itself. Were I about to write anything I fear to disclose, this occasion would scarce be the best; notwithstanding the undoubted security of all my letters, which thou engag'st for them at the family hotel in Paris, or even the promptitude ensured by adding the regimental title. To no other, however, would thy Etienne breathe the particulars of a secret only hinted to the same ear before—of a secret which, terrible, terrible as it is, seems destined only to re-interment. Divide the pang of its burial with me, O my Florian!—measure the force of an infatuation, by that of the duty it forces me to surrender! Despise my weakness, if it must be so, because, to understand it, the fascination would have to be seen—dost thou hear me?—to be *seen!*

Thanks to fate, perhaps, thou can'st not! If it were so, we might soon have to hate each other! Yet it is under this spell itself—amidst this very rapture—that the need of a friend burns me, and I tremble to lose thee!

"I had travelled with but vague ideas of ever probing this mystery; I had come to Europe, and reached Paris, mingling other objects with the hope of its solution and its sequel. Pleasure and friendship, it need not be now said, helped the time to fly there; we were both almost equally susceptible, I think, Florian, to the successive allurements of the Terpsichorean or the tragic nymph—but *I*, if possible, even more lightly, more changeably. It is not that thy veins drew a steadier fire from southern France, than the blood of the Tropic can sustain—it was that thy intellect, perhaps superior although younger, had the power of separating itself from thy *sentiments*, to a degree at which I confess I have sometimes wondered. The philosophers, the poets, the geometricians with their science, their fortification, their principles of gunnery, could tranquilly occupy the leisure of my French Pythias in the faubourg; while his Damon from the distant Antilles was vainly trying to pass the vacant hours at his window on the boulevard, with the help of past travel and of purposes for the future. Hence my apparent absorption in affairs which rather engage

the fancy than touch the heart; hence the reason, now intelligible to me, why I threw myself into a fresh and more piquant emotion, for whose delicacy thou hast scarcely allowed, in calling it 'an intrigue.' I now look back upon it with regret—true. Again I repeat, however, there is no similarity between it and a passion, a devotion, a flame of the whole being, which at once purifies and kindles—which must either obtain its right, or use the power of destruction it so strangely possesses over those who might still deny it! But no—no! do not imagine there is any fear of disappointment so far as *they* are concerned—on *his* part. I cannot even doubt my success in the end, where it is indispensable to succeed—where it would be transport, ecstasy, paradise! With due patience, Florian—yes, I say with patience! England, I must tell thee, my friend, is very different indeed from Paris.

"'Have I so much as once written to my *other* friend?' is one of the meaning but too-oracular questions which Florian puts to me—'to the unfortunate *Evandra?*' To which of our various agreeable acquaintances of the salons, or amiable correspondents from the provinces, this classic sobriquet was attached—I scarcely even recollected. As to the fair Marquise, allow me to forget *hers*, as it is certain that she must have forgotten both of ours, in those 'devotions to which she has returned of her own accord, at the gloomy château

in La Vendée.' I was not aware of it, certainly, but it is too flattering to insinuate that the coldness of the beautiful devotee was first broken 'by interest in a certain young traveller, whom the elderly Marquis was rash enough to invite in Paris—to hunt with in the provinces—to trust as a cavalier!' Once more believe me that the sudden classicism of Madame la Marquise was natural to her—her inaccessibility of heart was of that kind which hovers on the verge of danger to both, yet nothing could have been more Platonic than our conversations to the last, than our whole friendship. Be again assured that the hasty suppositions of M. le Marquis were confined to a political subject alone—we differed as to the prospects of Canada in a war. The temper of the Marquis, even as one of the most imperturbable and skilful fencers of the old school, was still ruffled when he fell before an antagonist less practised, but whose sense of injustice imparted coolness to a steady nerve, aided by the quickness and vigour of youth. An explanation was then possible—it was the Marquis himself who counselled me to fly; although his wound has not proved, as I am rejoiced to learn, either fatal or disabling in the end. To have written *then*—would have justified the most false of suspicions; I contented myself with an agitated message through my second—the same Florian who seems afterwards to have misinterpreted it! Was it

possible, subsequently, that I could have written to her at all without compromising her?

"It is à propos of all this, however, that I proceed with these explanations. In my consequent retirement, near the coast, letters continued to reach me from the colonies; in regard, chiefly, to the family business which then became more and more that of my life. It was needless to revisit that dilapidated old château of St. Amand, with its paltry remnant of an appanage, already undisputed with me so far as the mere property was concerned; and which we had visited together, Florian, if thou remember'st, the day after the wolf-hunt, talking of Madame de Sévigné and the Grand Monarque, and of St. Pierre's romantic lovers, whom we envied. For the title, it was more useless than ever to press *now*. St. Maloes was not far distant, where my deluded though pious mother, Madame la Supérieure, was yet still cut off from following natural instincts, by the wiles of priests as well as by a fanatical resignation. Her health suffered, I knew: at length, too, the obstinate silence was broken spontaneously, by a hurried letter in which her confessor *allowed* the son, ere their last mummeries should be performed over her death-bed, to take farewell! Can it be doubted that I obeyed the summons? To dwell on the particulars would be too painful, enough that there were some last undisguised accents, some irrepressible final glances

and betrayals of nature. *Nature*, more sacred than all that the priests of fifty centuries have imagined, forced their relinquishment of a few treasured relics, papers, and tokens, to me invaluable. The proof of her original affection, of her sense of justice, of her first prudence before forsaking the world, I did not need: not only had her own fortune and inheritance been received from her French mother on the settled condition that her children alone should be free to use it; not only had her other parent, my indulged grandfather, an exiled Englishman, at last bequeathed his entire property in the islands to her sole worldly heir—to myself—but the accumulations of both fortunes till my majority, amounting to a sum in itself considerable, had been secured from ecclesiastical reach. The whole had been duly, fully conveyed to me when I became of age; I had been, since then, rich beyond the desires of most men; placed, besides, above care or risk in the management of distant property, by the services of the same long-tried agents whom my grandfather had employed.

"Their conjuries and charlatanries of 'extreme unction!'—of the 'mass!'—would of themselves have forced me from beside the pallet in that austere, that hideous cell. Their rules had even been relaxed to admit me! I remained in the neighbourhood till all was over, I returned to gaze

stupified on the mute remains, to hear the chapel resounding with sepulchral chaunts, to witness the stern obsequies which still estranged a mother, and for ever, from an only child. In fine, my demands were received jointly by the sub-prioress of the convent, a dull puppet of fanatical artifice, evidently about to replace her departed superior, and by the private confessor, an inexorable bigot, doubtless a Jesuit, who if he had even dared say more, would have denied it to me, would have preferred to retain his impassible and stony aspect, more horrible than that of the dead. I knew enough before—I had again found enough in those scanty relics—to rouse from an impulse to a passion the claim of full justice, nourished since childhood. In itself, the French title was almost nothing—the relationship to my grandfather's English family was still less—like that to my unfortunate father's Spanish house, which, however noble, was extinct with him. No—it was for the *right*, for the *vindication*, for the full power to trace out—and for the inevitable means to exact—a sacred vengeance! it was for this that I besought them so eagerly, so simply!

"What folly! In vain, my friend. The Cistercian, the Jesuit, had alike given up the world—they had ceased, of course, to care for its affairs—there was nothing else to give up to me, unless the crucifix which their abbess had worn, the beads

of a rosary, the jagged girdle and vest of haircloth. She had long ago ceased to have to confess carnal errors, worldly resentments, secular ambitions or vanities.

"The tragedy of my noble father's fate had crushed her heart, Florian. But these monkish ascetics had done their best, since then, to annihilate it.

"No matter, I at least knew before, that if the monster who had probably escaped was still alive, he had concealed himself in a labyrinth. As a child, I had committed it all to heart from the lips of my Spanish nurse, Juanita—from my kind grandfather's admissions—even from the wild signs and uncouth scribblings of the poor dumb mulatto slave, Adolphe, who, when a lad, had so unexpectedly survived the plot of blood. The clue had always been refused by my mother, but she forgot the quiet shrewdness of old Morel, our West Indian agent, from whose relaxed caution I had already forced the thread leading to discovery. Without needing to see him again, in short, I passed at once to England, where traces of the chief villain crowded upon me with a distinctness confirmed by his own manner, his character, his conduct towards me—whether but alarmed at first, or afterwards only self-deceived into a characteristic sordidness of purpose. Nay, for a time, the darker suspicion even maddened me with delight—that

instead of merely tracking the detested instigator, I had actually found the still more atrocious tool, the more infuriating and hideous traitor whose hand did the deed. I thrilled with the belief for a while —so astute did he seem, so capable of the whole in his younger days—not merely that the fiend Coguel had escaped—that he had had a deeper motive than revenge and bribery—but that this was *Coguel himself*. I swear to thee still, Florian—by the most sacred, the most awful of memories I swear—that nothing—*nothing* could have withheld Coguel from the retribution I brought—from the destruction I was meditating. I now believe that if Coguel really escaped, he did not take shelter here. Probably, as he could have demanded concealment, reward, fresh bribery—he is long ago dead.

"Does passion blind me, my friend? Perhaps —yes—I confess it. I have even lost the shame of confessing it. Listen, I tell thee, in order to compute the force of the influence that conquers me. *She*, at all events—the divine Catherine—Catherine Spencer! ah, Florian, her very name seems profaned just now, unless I blend it with thine. She is innocent, she is quite unconscious [thanks to some fortunate star, thanks to the intense respectability of England, it may be], as to these earlier antecedents of her parent's career, *now* so specious, so elevated! If she could ever suspect

or discover these, I know not whether I should most tremble or—perhaps—be the more secured. The Spencers owe me something, do they not? I imagine unknown depths in her dazzling eye; she is certainly conspicuous for the fearless transparency of her exquisite nature, for a superb superiority to artifice—to the ordinary motives—which enchant while they distract one.

"Coguel, did I say? I forgot, my friend, that I had told nothing of this before. Coguel was the ex-lieutenant of the armed *guarda-costa* [a large vessel for the Government service around Cuba] which Don Victor de Etterega de la Castra commanded. Coguel had been cashiered for insubordination, by my father; but afterwards professed to offer himself as a spy against the *contrabandisti* and pirates; living in Jamaica as a so-called Portuguese trader. It was in Jamaica that Messrs. Broadby and Co. had their agency; a valuable vessel belonging to that establishment was about the same time mysteriously lost, giving rise to suspicions of plunder. It is known that Coguel either endeavoured or pretended to give information to *them* also, being notoriously dependent upon their trade; and a letter, addressed by one of their agents to him, was found among the few personal articles in his house at Kingston —avowedly showing that this agent accused Don Victor, my noble father, of collusion with the

pirates—that a grudge was thus borne against him —that Coguel was being urged, nay suborned at any cost, to entrap him to destruction. *This letter*, observe, Florian—a faded, tattered fragment, with the signature torn off and the handwriting evidently disguised, but in the paper of which can be detected an unintentional impress of Broadby and Co.'s office stamp beneath all—*I now possess.* The shrewdness of our agent at St. Lucie, M. Morel—then a much younger man—had induced him to obtain it from the careless police of Kingston and to preserve it among other apparent trifles.

"Coguel had crossed over to the Cuban coast; he had secretly gone on board Don Victor's corvette, with information, real or pretended, about a *contrabandista* which they chased unsuccessfully. What I now mention, is partly derived from the vivid recollections of Juanita, my old nurse—who, it is true, knew but little of the technical circumstances; also, however, from the direct evidence of poor Adolphe, the mulatto, then a boy amidst the crew of the vessel of war itself—whose inarticulate signs, in themselves perhaps the more cruelly expressive, were afterwards elucidated by his acquired ability to write. This young slave was a favourite of his commander, my father, to whom he was in return fondly attached; often accom-

panying him, or allowed the privilege of entrance on occasions of the most dangerous, important, or private nature. On the contrary, he was envied, hated, ill-treated by Coguel. It was Coguel himself who, taking advantage of some trivial disgrace on the boy's part at sea, had officially entered his cell by night, and with his own hand committed the diabolical act of rendering him dumb for ever. On the ultimate reappearance of this demon in the ship, with specious words, but serpent eye—can we be surprised if Adolphe watched his every action, and treasured the memory of his crime.

"The *guarda-costa* was obliged, by some accident, to make for the coast; and, before reaching a harbour, to disembark the sick, the wounded, with the only two females on board, at a desolate rock not far from the very haunts of the pirates about the island De Los Pinos, but under charge of the veteran portion of the crew; some of whom, indeed, were in the habit of remaining on watch there. On the night of the horrible tragedy, the other sailors had already dismantled the vessel, in order to careen it. It lay almost untenable, to await further operations at the first tide; but Coguel, himself an experienced pilot and seaman, instigated Don Victor, on the plea of danger from any delay in the work, to remain on board with the crew till morning. He even urged for permission to

give them liquor, probably encouraging them to ply themselves with it; although mutinous symptoms had been shown. There was a haughty confidence about my father, alas! but too overweening in the circumstances. Recriminations, which were natural, passed between him and Coguel. The latter had shared the excesses of the crew, or *appeared* to have done so, even to the extent of making menaces—which were smiled at; failing these, of a threat to fire the magazine, to which he had access—but without exciting dread from his cowardice, even from his cunning. His interests were presumed, too rashly, to lie the other way. The sleep of all was heavy, except that of Adolphe, and of this fiend in human form. Adolphe soon stole from the confined shelf below the stern, in which he slept—but too late! The door defied his efforts. For some moments, all was silent as before; unless for a muffled oar-stroke which he imagined to steal away behind, in the darkness of the night and of the ocean. He knew nothing more but of a lightning-flash, an exploding shock of thunder, amidst which he sank with the falling fragments; afterwards to float instinctively to the beach, sole surviver of those on board the ship. The sail of Coguel's pinnace had been noticed before the catastrophe by a sentinel on the islet; pursuit was, for the time, beyond nature—beyond any means then at hand. He was

ultimately reported to have been seen in disguise at Kingston, but before there was cause to accuse him. Inquiries by English authorities were slight indeed. They did not even trouble themselves to connect the rumour with that of a connexion between him and the agent of Broadby and Co., who was soon replaced from England—actually being recalled there, however, (as was discovered afterwards by our acute agent,) only to be favoured and promoted.

"The motive of this incredible villain may well be asked. It lay deeper than a sudden irritation, certainly—deeper even than the base bribery or the sordid interest of English commerce itself, whose utter coldness of calculation might, after all, when one is face to face with it, be punished best in its own way. Even if it were possible to me otherwise, Florian!—if the very power were not useless, supposing it gained!—if I could dare so much as to fancy myself disappointed, forced to resent anything from *her*, to detest what SHE loves and must revere!

"Coguel bore a keener, an older enmity to my father. It was not even that he had been cashiered as a lieutenant. He, too, had seen my mother before her marriage, when Don Victor and he together had enjoyed hospitalities from the rich planters of the Jamaica coast, as Spanish naval

officers in the neighbourhood. The marriage itself was romantic—in short, an elopement. My grandfather resided at the time in Jamaica; his only daughter—an heiress, beautiful, capricious, poetical—had met Don Victor at assemblies in the town, and at the frank, social entertainments for which the mountain plantations are remarkable. Her unsophisticated mind was struck with him; his passion for her was ardent as his nature; he was proud—my grandfather wealthy. The one was a child of the tropic, remember; the other a son of old Castile. At a plantation-ball, near the coast, the opportunity arrived; they fled together to an armed boat in the creek, the corvette hovered near, with Juanita and the chaplain of the vessel to receive her. Her father's indignation may be conceived; it was vain for the time—afterwards, till too late, inexorable. He himself confessed it to me, when a child beside him, with tears; for no sooner was it irreparable, and my mother on her knees at his feet once more, than her anguish overwhelmed his. A year had not passed; I was born on the passage to St. Lucie—her own native place—where we all returned. Justice or vengeance was nothing to the old man—nothing to her who sought consolation, and found superstition, in a European convent.

"I had both of them to avenge, Florian. And

how, thou wilt demand, is the task being performed? are both to be forgotten?—*both* in vain to whisper to me at moments, in tones that chill the blood, that the necessity may come?

"What do I say? No, no, my friend; again I am convinced that Coguel yet haunts the earth —that its slimy secresies have only effaced his traces for a little. And, could I see clearly enough, I would at once follow them again. The suspicion clings to me that he was English; London is full of such hidden ghoules. I am going to London; write to me there till the spring.

"Oh, Florian, a war—a war of the whole world—a revolt of the lowest canaille—a revolution of empires—all would be nothing to my thirst, at times, for justice to those who claim it from me!

"There is in the very air of this England—in their customs and idioms—their faces—their very under tones and side-accents—I know not what of a perplexing, a subtle, an irresistible effect. The mind alters under it, like the tongue. Thou canst not know it, without living here awhile; recollect, there is something of their blood in these veins.

"As a friend, my Florian, divide with me what I have thus suffered; as for the rest, one must endeavour to suffer a rapture, a hope, a desire—*alone*. Write to me at London, at the Inn of the Northumberland Arms, Northumberland-street,

Westminster. *Friends*, at all events, are not separated by oceans; *they* are permitted to write to each other. I shall write to you again.

"Ever your

"ETIENNE.

"To Monsieur, M. the Vicomte de La Trebouille,
Sub-Lieutenant of the Artillery, Brigade 5me,
Hôtel de Mabercy, Fauxbourg St. Germain,
Paris."

CHAPTER II.

AN EVENT FOR MR. HARRY SPENCER.

Deep down in the cockpit-berth of the *Astræa* frigate, remote in a continual night from the eye of authority, was the midshipmen's mess, where Harry had his abode. By day it was dimly glimmered upon, from without, by a regulation-lantern or two in whitewashed passages either way toward store-rooms, magazines, and cable-tiers; with cross-lights from the doors of intermediate caves, where warrant-officers attended to their business, where distant workshops plied their several crafts, or the surgeon's assistant periodically dispensed his drugs, the purser's steward served out his provisions, the mate of the hold saw to his duty. At worst, a sentry's regular tread was always heard there; under-signs of the ship's living motion were there never imperceptible; there was outside room to spare at

night, for inadmissible hammocks; and it was then altogether a quarter favourable to avoidance of disagreeable company if necessary, to solitary meditation if desirable, even to ultimate justice if tyranny were pushed too far. No one's remains could well be lost there in the end; it was impossible to drop overboard thence on a sudden, or to be pitched outright into the neighbouring eddies that ran above its level: but this was almost the best that could be said. Within, the berth enjoyed by day a half-reflection from the main-hatchways, aided by a bull's-eye in the berth-deck above, both of which were too constantly traversed to avail much; the defect being feebly supplied by a couple of purser's-dips, in bottles fastened to the opposite bulk-head partitions, with a hanging *slush*-lamp for night over the broad deal table in the midst—where, happily, the *Astræa* being new, no unpleasant traces of surgical work had ever as yet been left.

Here, however, it happened naturally that two extremes of naval cadetship met in their most incongruous form; and the chance had led all along to more than common trouble in the cockpit of the *Astræa*. Her eager little well-born "reefers," recommended by Lord Beaufoy or brought by Captain Herbert, were associated of course with "oldsters" from before the Peace, who had come in under Boscawen or Hawke; amongst whom one

or two, old enough to have served with Benbow, appeared to have caught at the faintest hope of rising yet, through the war, above some nameless necessity on shore. It might be nothing to be set under overgrown young-gentlemen, who shaved themselves as bare as land-bucks, beaus, and maccaronis—to accept the scraps of mature master's-mates—even to be subject to the eccentricities of the antiquated one who always preferred duty below, as mate of the hold—nor was it quite unbearable to be cursed for being young, for having a mother, for getting letters from home, by the fat goggle-eyed man with a wig, who was always so jolly to others, and could always explain why he never hitherto had become a *passed* midshipman. The very "loblolly-boy"—assistant-surgeon, as he preferred to be styled—could be endured, though he went the length of adding an occasional kick to his bad language: for, according to Little Blakely and his small compeers, he had corny toes, and he was so long that he often hit his head against the beams—besides, he dared not do it when Coventry, the big signal-middy, was by, or if Harry Spencer watched him; as to his tongue, why, he never could help betraying by it that he was Scotch; then his hair was so laughably red, that all the powder and pomatum melted off about his ears. Little Blakely said they had all of them been fags at Rugby, or Eton, or somewhere else—which was worse, because there was no spar-

deck to go up to, nor topsails to see reefed. On the whole, Little Blakely thought Harry the worst off; seeing that he was neither exactly youngster nor oldster, and so, not being rightly backed-up by Coventry—who was such a strong fellow, but too cool and easy—why, then of course, he got lots of awkwardness between 'em. Some day soon, Old Burt would be pitching into Harry in earnest! Burt had his eye on him already, Blakely thought,—a very savage sort of an eye too. As to Burt being rough *again* to the boy himself, there was no great fear—the senior master's-mate wasn't the worst of 'em—he was cautious enough, if not too far roused; and when he hurt him lately, it was really half accident. The fact was, that what seemed making matters worse was just Harry's inclining of late to speak up overmuch—and being thought in favour with the first-lieutenant, as well as suspected of being a relation of the captain himself. "As to going and speaking to the Captain right out! O—oh for goodness-sake, Spencer!" murmured Little Blakely, starting, as they held their heads together over the dark bulwarks of the frigate in the second dog-watch, "don't—*don't!* That's worst of all!"

There had never been any light-hearted practical jokes or merry tricks among the midshipmen; school-fagging was bad enough in those days, but not so bad as theirs. Though the *Astræa* was

better than many, she was worse in this point than even ships with martinet first-lieutenants, or with the very cruelest tyrants for captains; who sometimes at least held all beneath them in wholesome awe. In her cockpit-mess there swarmed no less than nineteen persons of various ages, from the slender boy of nine to the gruff oldster of thirty and upwards; whose several ratings in the service thus duly assigned their quarters together, and few of whom had not been attracted, indeed, by the name of a good influential captain; though some were in their own minds vastly above such a base thought. Three full-blown master's-mates—with all proper deference to Mr. Maclean the doctor's-mate, and some indispensable consideration for the size and pugilistic science of Jack Coventry, the big midshipman (whose reputed father's title did not weigh in the matter)—had constituted themselves lawful rulers and standing caterers of the mess; there was an ancient code, apparently handed down from the earliest voyagers, by which they professed to govern those nearest their level, while it was tacitly admitted even by the luckless senior or two. For every other, it was a secret, arbitrary, most extraordinarily arduous law, compared with which Draco's would sometimes have been mild, or that of Moses flexible; the Articles of War were familiar and motherly by contrast, yet could not be for a moment referred to for appeal: the constant

anxiety of Little Blakely and his comrades to know it, alone preserved them; and it was true that young Spencer's inward pride lent it a sharper sting, for otherwise his previous experience had carried him through. There was one new middy, a soft lumpish lad with fair hair and blinking eyes, who had suffered a great deal more outwardly: he having once rebelled and gone with his complaint to the first-lieutenant, but so like to sob that he had broken down in it. And a dog's life did he lead afterwards between them all, because he never could recollect things—even Harry not caring much to be in the same watch: the truth being, that Cobbinshaw was by no means gentlemanly, not to say manful; he would crib raisins from the very galley, if a cook's-mate turned his back; he carried tales, too, and always used to talk about two aunts he had in Yorkshire, that made such prime Christmas-cake and calf's-foot jelly—how glad they would have been if he had consented to become a solicitor or a parson, in which case they would both have left him their money. Sometimes swearing he would sink the ship that moment if he could, at all events Cobbinshaw was resolved to cut it the very instant they were safe at Spithead again. On which accounts Harry had a difficulty in concealing a dislike that grew upon him toward Cobbinshaw; while Cobbinshaw in turn became no friend of his, and had begun of late to get on better with

others, reconciling himself as much as possible to the system below-decks, and only talking of his aunts at times—evidently then for mere appearance' sake, if not with a view to draw out Harry.

All the cockpit oldsters and caterers affected to be quite on a level with each other; yet Mr. John Burt, second master's-mate, was undeniably best man there—"cock of the whole roost" as Coventry phrased it, with his easy laugh. Burt had an elder namesake there, the obsolete midshipman with the wig; whom it was known the captain had got appointed, no doubt to give the old boy a last start, out of pity: but the two appeared to have no relationship whatever. Mr. John Burt stood stiff upon his merits; a first-rate seaman he was—a good navigator—altogether a man that might have been in Lieutenant Holmes's place at that moment, only for one fault he had; a fault not easy to indulge at sea, and quite kept down in a frigate like the *Astræa*—though betrayed by some scarlet streaks on his nose, getting pimplier, sometimes fiery. His unpolished manners perhaps had stood in his way, for the quarter-deck itself could not prevent his looking ungracious; as to the rest of him—a fresh-coloured, good-looking, bluff, thick-set model of a man to show the way on a topsail-yard in heavy gales, or for the fore part of a gun-deck when the smoke blows through in action. Down below he did not say much, he had not many

new notions; he only wanted what he had of them to be carried out: and his will was more than law in the cockpit. Argument had never vexed him there, indeed; the mere shadow of a sudden involuntary look resembling argument—once when he gave his dogged mind to some one else that spoke—had brought a bottle at young Spencer's up-raised head; the fragments of which, shivered against the bulk-head beyond, Harry duly picked up at his silent nod, and was but taking them away too readily, when Mr. Burt chucked them from his hand with an oath, until further orders. Luckily for the youth, Mr. Burt was too unquestionable a power to require this sort of thing often; fortunately, if he drank the combined allowances of liquor which youngsters saved in tribute for him, it was at times when his excess was safe for all concerned; happily, too, it chanced that Mr. Burt and Harry did not belong to the same watch.

It was Burt's doing, however, that some slight unauthorised alterations were now made in the watches, as these had been constituted by Mr. Holmes. The harassing fitfulness of tropical weather, at the season, had led the first-lieutenant to obtain leave to divide them, so far as the officers were concerned, into three. Mr. John Burt had used the private freedom to make a change as regarded the cockpit, by which Little Blakely attended below when the said master's-mate

escended, or when he hastened to arise; for the lights were not always trim, nor reasonable draughts of cordial at hand, whereas the long nights were pitch-dark and sweltering hot, with drenching squalls, that made a dry shirt welcome, or an oil-skin-coat imperative in a hurry. No ill-will could have been felt at Little Blakely, whose nimble willingness, in fact, recommended him; but it was to an error on his part in some such duty that the ill-treatment had been owing, of which the captain himself had fancied he saw traces at his cabin-table. Chance or not, the despots had so distributed their slaves among each other as to suggest the idea of deliberate spite; leaving none of them without their special little victims, and neither place nor period which could be called free from their general tyranny; while even big Coventry, who had been always near Little Blakely before, was shuffled out of sight into Harry's own watch, with no small appearance of design. It was certainly something to be rid of Cobbinshaw, that selfish lout; and better still—though they had, of course, not meant it—that a quiet talk on the matter could now be had, from night to night, with Coventry as he leant over the bulwarks.

Big Coventry was rather lazily inclined; he objected chiefly, at that time, to the squally weather—to the infernally discontented notion about chasing all sorts of craft, no matter how

respectable, as they stood in flocks for Jamaica, or shaped a course for Barbadoes—to the quantity of useless signalling he had to look sharp about—the consequent injury to Mr. Holmes's temper—above all, to the Cape cockroaches [always left torpid at that port by the Indiamen] which now swarmed up on board, as long as the Trades didn't blow. The cockroaches, Coventry was of opinion, might even excuse a little bearishness in Old Burt; one couldn't sleep for 'em, however hard one had been at it in his watch; coming out of a fellow's hair as they did, with their feelers stuck out lest they fell over his forehead, then flying into his mouth; after hunting the rats over the empty water-casks down in the hold! However, Coventry was struck at once with Harry's idea that the mates were going rather too far, and a "purchase" might now be got upon them to pull matters straight. He agreed it was not quite the thing for Mr. John Burt to snap his fingers at the captain's name. Coventry altogether fell into the notion that a fair constitutional freedom was the right of every Briton, with caterers, fags, and so on, in regular rotation,—rules fairly understood, and no brow-beating over the majority, as well as no punishment for reasonable complaints; what was more, he said, they would *have it!*

Jack Coventry, when once stirred up, was an exceedingly prompt fellow; if anything, too much

so. "What was the use of putting off?" he asked; though the fact was, that with any one else than Coventry by his side, to bear him out, young Spencer would have thought twice before personally bringing things to a head; and, as it was, he felt nervous when they went down together to do so at the end of their watch on deck. It was Coventry who took the spokesman's part upon himself, and told Burt all—while he still lay half-dressed in his hammock, stretching his arms, taking the first chew of a fresh quid, and looking at the lamp as Little Blakely held up his clothes: the tall midshipman sitting down on Burt's sea-chest, as he coolly mentioned the decision, and then quite carelessly leaning over to see if there was anything left in the grog-pot. Harry Spencer, on the other hand, standing by with his courage desperately screwed up, and anxious to see how the rest would take it. After a start and a stare, a scowl and a frightful oath, the master's-mate said nothing more, however; but jumped out, pulled on his jacket and trousers, and ran up to relieve the deck. As to the others who were there, few could help laughing at Old Burt's look. As soon as he was gone, every one worth considering was quite agreeable to give in to the change; those who were asleep at the time waking half up to approve: and even *Young* Burt, Mr. Billy Burt (so they used to style the elderly mid, who was

the senior by all modes of reckoning except the naval), sided without hesitation against *Mister* Burt's assumptions, as if to disprove the charge of being any relative whatever.

This was the first time that Harry had put himself at all forward there, and most of the mess now inclined to like him, suddenly considering him a very good sort of fellow; none the less so for Coventry's chumming with him, nor for the evident popularity which had been gained him among old quartermasters and active topmen, by Diamond's accounts. He really knew more of the ropes than half the mess did, though he had made no show; he could have managed to stow the mizen-royal in a squall by himself, if such had been now proper in his position; there were even two or three out-of-the-way knots, splices, and flemishes—practised by veteran A.B.'s alone, revealed to few, and only to be acquired with perfection in the studious solitude of the merchant service, with which Dick Diamond could be seen in sequestered corners to perplex raw hands of the waist or after-guard, he having singular instincts for that art—but some of which Harry could have explained in passing by. As for Burt's shaken power, the worst of it seemed gone; Little Blakely and his companions appeared gayer already, while various immunities began to be taken quietly by the rest, though with shrewd

looks toward Coventry or Harry. For a day or two he felt in particular good spirits.

The weather was steadying, the fickle airs and weary calms giving place to breezes from the tail of the Trade, as the frigate slipped once more to windward of her range, and got currents under her foot, off the easterly edge of the great Gulf Stream. Jack Coventry and Harry grew very friendly of a night, walking the weather gangway together, or leaning over and talking; he was, perhaps, the reverse of bright-witted, was Jack; and his talk might have struck a stranger as monotonous, coming always round again, like the *Astræa* herself, to somewhere about the same latitudes and longitudes, with similar beating of the ground between. But he had his specially good points; indeed, he was not in the slightest degree desirous to retain the honorary but troublesome post of signal-midshipman—far from it. His heart had been quite gained through Harry sympathising with him, over and over, on the sole question of a strong preference for Liverpool ale over London stout—until Harry had feared his weariness of the remark must have been too obvious—all the more so as Coventry never varied in his reasons; laying stress invariably upon the froth of the liquor, and stipulating that it should be Hardy and Son's October brewing—in pewter,

too, to give it fair play. Coventry never would have come out on other matters as he did, save through this friendly feeling; he had an eye, a hand, a way of standing or stepping, indeed, that evinced to connoisseurs the fact of his early proficiency in the noble art of self-defence; but he had only spoken hitherto of all sorts of manly sports he had affected, rather than be bored with overmuch school—cock-fighting, fishing, walking-matches, bull-baiting, shooting-galleries, race-seeing, and betting; with all of which he had been from infancy too familiar to dwell upon them in any disagreeably vivid way. If he now went so far as to broach the subject of sparring-practice, inquiring whether it was much gone into about Bristol, it was with delicacy, for Spencer's good; and when the latter confessed that nature had been his chief guide in that respect hitherto, there was thorough cordiality in Jack's accepted offer to give him a few quiet lessons as soon as possible, down on the orlop-deck—which might help to supply the defect in question, and at once to put him nearer on a par with any oldster. Jack Coventry had not only natural gifts—he had studied under the champion himself, at that time a Lancashire man—he had once met with Jem Cheanen of Lincoln, and actually knew Ben Wake of Barnsley, who had obtained the victory over him on the 13th of January was a year, after Ben had got one

arm broke. At the same time, Coventry did not omit to anticipate accidents, by even then hastily putting Harry up to the principal *guard*, to the *feint*, and *flying side-step*, on which much depended. As respected the emphatic "auctioneer," the "long left-handed Melford" (for which manual resource Jack betrayed a partial fondness), or the swift "Whitechapel upper-cut"—these were niceties requiring more time and care, some of them needing training and muscle, which would merely confuse for the present. But, in fact, if Mr. Burt had anything practical to say just now, why, of course, there was no doubt that *he*, Coventry, was the party he ought to say it to—and for that matter, in any case he would *need to*. Allowing for age, thought Coventry, they were about on a balance with regard to science.

The night, though breezy aloft, was hot within the high bulwarks of the deck; the darkness seemed to make it closer: from talking they fell to leaning their heads against the hammock nettings, till at length, with some drowsy remark about going aloft to see how matters went in the mizen-top, Mr. Coventry stole away and vanished beyond the third-lieutenant's zealous view. Harry Spencer was keeping himself awake by thinking [of nothing in particular], by whistling secretly for wind, and by peering far into the blackest quarter of the sky; when all at once the little reefer,

Blakely, came shuffling up from the main-hatch-way, evidently looking about for some one as he loitered near. Harry asked if it were for *him*; and the boy hesitated in a frightened way, which raised suspicions of fresh ill-usage. "No—yes—well, he was to come down and speak a moment to Mr.—Mr. Coventry—about something." "To Coventry! Was Coventry *below?*" "Down in the berth—you—you've forgotten something," said Little Blakely, creeping nearer, as if to whisper; but the fretful mate of the watch strode forward, and the little fellow had to take himself off again below. When Harry asked formal permission to leave the deck for a minute, it was nevertheless given with all the mock ceremonious indifference in the world—as if the *Astræa*, forsooth, could lose by *his* temporary absence! Not in the best temper or most cheerful mood did he descend from ladder to ladder into the bowels of the ship—there yearning drearily towards him, and making a rattling plash again into her lowest hollows, as if the dregs of a cask were rinsing out—with ever and anon a jerking strain of her whole weary fabric on every side; the closeness ever felt more stifling at every step, the gangway lanterns winking feebler, the ugly flavours reeking distincter up; while as the lamp inside the cockpit swung irregularly about, it made a dull light go swaying through the open doorway, far into the shadow, as

if it sought to pierce the gloom of the store-rooms forward. And though there was noisy laughter within, even snatches of jovial singing—still was Harry's fancy seized by an odd notion before he dropped beyond sight of the nearest ranges of hammocks, where a hundred-and-fifty stout blue-jackets and marines were asleep close at hand. They had looked to him, with their pointed ends catching the glimmer—slung as they were side by side to the beams of the main-deck—like two sets of canoes in war-array against each other, or so many cradles rocking in unison, with a sudden gap between for himself; whence he glanced up and saw the stars through the rigging, and wondered if he would see the end of the war—or perhaps rather be killed in battle against the enemies of his king and country, when at all events it would be known at home that he died gloriously.

The cockpit table bore really a slight resemblance to its likely state amidst an action—for at one end, on the bench, lay old Mr. Billy Burt, asleep with his wig awry, snoring heavily—while a senior master's-mate, whose watch was past, still sat at the other end after some unusual chance of festivity; his face being dropped upon it over his arms, dozing and snorting beside a can that had held liquor—good port wine this time, as was shown by a pool of it they had spilt, with finger-marks

of a sort of rude chart they had been drawing as to the ship's place at the time, and more comical outlines of the first-lieutenant's long-nosed visage. A dirty pack of cards were scattered over all—but the quickest survey by young Spencer was enough to rouse a misgiving on his own part; since his tall friend Coventry was not there, and Mr. Burt *was*. He sat quiet enough, indeed, nor by any means excited by drink, in fact scarce half dressed; yet only bolt upright and preternaturally tranquil. There were two juniors on a chest in a corner, partly amused, rather tending to dismay, however—then Little Blakely, who had hidden for a moment, ran out from below the hammocks and would have screamed, but broke down and began silently to cry—while the lank assistant-surgeon stood behind the door, holding it to; the latter drawled out something about discipline, insubordinate conduct, a court-martial, and the call for a warning example in disloyal times like these —the other master's-mate lifted his head with a drowsy, peering, supercilious air, and nodded slow approval: whereupon Mr. Burt rose up deliberately, rolling up his shirt-sleeves, taking from his trousers-pocket a short piece of rope such as tradition allowed, and invoking dreadful penalties upon himself, both corporeal and spiritual, if he did not "once for all cob this young lubber of a sea lawyer within an inch of what he deserved."

"I'm not aware, Mr. Burt——" stammered the

lad, shifting round the table. "Mind, sir, I'm on duty; the officer of the watch only gave me——"

"No more of your jaw here, ye sprig of a Bristol trader ye," snarled the master's-mate, advancing; "I'll teach ye to come the Colonial in his Majesty's service—better give in at once and be cobbed—none o' yer captain's pets below, look. None o' your she-cook of a mammy's apron-strings, either, curse 'em—did the captain know her, eh? Master Coventry was below, was he—the infernal Baronet's by-blow that he is! I'll settle with *him* afterwards—come, down with ye, d'ye hear." Some of the sleepers in the shelves and hammocks, half wakened by Burt's savage roar, looked stupidly over at him; the senior mate, a better-hearted, more gentlemanly, and younger colleague, could only lift his head again and stare. "Whass-all-'e-row, eh? Bub-burt, eh!" said he, running his words together and hiccuping—for Mr. Evelyn was not accustomed to exceed, and always preferred wine. "I-say-iss-shortathing-won 'do y' know-*hick*. B' Jove-se-serves-'e-fla-right, though. *Hick-hick*. Sess' of-cormartial-isn't-it?"

"Hold off, Mr. Burt," said Harry, standing at bay, in a resolute attitude of self-defence as Burt came near. In fact, it was less *fear* that he experienced, than a wild gratification at the thought of being struggled with, touched, felt—even at the ecstatic thought that his own strength might have made such progress in two sea-voyages, that the hints of

Coventry might be so useful, and the absence of science in his foe so complete, as perhaps to enable him to "floor" the latter altogether, with only fair play round the cockpit. "Hold off! I warn you!" cried he, setting his teeth together, with an eye into Burt's eye; "don't touch me, you——"

And as Burt's hand more cautiously clutched hold of Harry's jacket, the other hand raising the first stroke, Harry dodged and hit him right out from the shoulder on one temple; then, as quick as could be, planted a follower somewhere about the opposite eye. Burt reeled back, dropped the rope, and, squaring furiously, went at him in return with less speedy success than might have been supposed. Down the hatchway-ladder, Harry thought he heard a quick, firm step. Certainly, the next moment or so, there came an impatient kick at the door, with something like a run back, to come full drive against it; but the noise around was stifling it, and he never saw what followed. He was not sixteen yet, whereas Burt might have been full five-and-twenty, and more. So, after a violent fall, there came a grasp upon his throat that was choking him; an oath hissed in his ears unmeaningly, that at another time would have made his blood run cold. "Sink ye, you overgrown young beggar!" howled Burt; "you'd try the ruffling style on me, would ye?" Burt pulled up the lad's head, and shook it down

again upon some ring-bolt, or corner of a chest, which ended all consciousness of the matter. The fellow was still doing it, in his extreme rage, when the tall figure of Jack Coventry burst in.

Coventry kicked Mr. Burt up from the floor; he called the master's-mate a name or two which more than ever stirred the savage in him; and they both stood up in the ring together. Once, twice, thrice—a fourth time, if it had been needed—did Jack hit the other down with but a slight change of his particular touches, the favourite amongst which seemed to be his "long left-hander;" but the master's-mate did not attempt to "come up to time" for the fourth, only rising in the end to take a seat, very sullenly indeed. Still Harry Spencer lay, and made no motion; the blood oozed from between the back of his head and the deck-floor. He was so fully thought to be dead, that Maclean, the surgeon's-mate, gave him up. Coventry sent up a wakened marine to report it to the Lieutenant in charge, though Little Blakely had anticipated him. The master-at-arms and a sentry, with the surgeon and another officer, were coming down already; and Mr. Burt was duly taken under arrest to a main-deck state-room, to await justice in the morning.

Days might have passed, apparently; they had really done so, when the young midshipman came to

full knowledge of his condition, or his whereabouts. He only knew that it was broad daylight, in a regularly-hung cot, such as the officers had—within a neat state-room, which enclosed a gun-port and a heavy gun. The port-lid was half up, and there came through it the pleasantest current of light air, helped by the open upper bars of the door opposite; the sunlight glistened in a hot bright streak along from the polished black muzzle of the thirty-two-pounder, splintering into small rays, like a star that burned upon it; and outside could be seen, if he lifted his head a little, the lifting of the dark-blue wrinkled surges that twinkled and sparkled in silver light, with a liquid motion alongside. Nor was that needed to tell that the ship moved with them; so pleasant the sense of her sliding buoyancy, and of the seething sea that swelled up beneath her fore-chains, and bubbled past, as in frigates only it can be felt. After the sick calms, with that struggle against Burt, and the vague dreams and the utter unconsciousness that had followed, his situation seemed almost heavenly to young Spencer. He was on the main-deck, he saw; it was morning, too, for they began to wash decks above. After that, the door quietly opened, and the black face of Dick Diamond was put in, shining like the gun itself from under his straw hat. Harry lay still, and seemed to close his eyes; and Diamond, taking

off his hat, slipped in on tiptoe to the gun-carriage, on one truck-wheel of which he sat down, feeling under the gun's breech for something, as if its coins and tackle had been shelves in a cupboard: till he drew forth a tin with a pewter-spoon in it, at which he smelt, making a very wry face; then set it down on deck under the cot, looking up for a moment again toward its inmate; and finally, discovered a roll of pigtail tobacco, off which he bit a piece, returning the rest to its place. He surveyed the thirty-two-pounder all over, from breech to muzzle, with a sort of fond interest, making a humming noise all the while, somewhat like a bee at the bottom of a great flower, or a bluebottle-fly in a jug; and, with one arm thrown round its middle, laid his black cheek against its smooth throat, as he stooped to peer attentively at the horizon. Nor was it without amusement amidst the curiosity, that his former patron eyed him; reminded of Dick's quick attachments to all kinds of creatures, save those of his own kind, with his tender partings from Neptune and the ponies in Somersetshire, and the house-dog at Bristol: though, amidst the frigate's crew, he had been almost lost sight of, and had meanwhile acquired a smart man-of-war's-man air, with a neat blue-check shirt inside a white duck frock and sail-canvas trousers, with part of the dockyard manufactory-stamp upon one leg, containing the king's

broad arrow above the mark of quality No. 7, and part of the red selvage-thread that indicates Chatham Dockyard. A ribbon round his hat bore, moreover, in yellow letters on the front, the name "*Astræa;*" so that Diamond had altogether a wonderfully cool, refreshing look as he leant there, half out of the port. And Harry at last spoke to him; feeling still some pain at the back of his head, however, and finding himself rather weak when he sat up.

The negro jumped to his feet at once, and taking up the tin pannikin from the deck, stirred it hastily, then held it with both hands to his quondam young master. The smell was sufficient for the midshipman, and he flung it angrily away, contents and all, somewhat to the detriment of the gun; which Diamond rushed immediately to wipe, but, having no other means, wiped it with his head—where the ship's barber, in his endeavours to form the short embryo of a man-o'-war queue behind, had shorn the sable wool rather close. Diamond cast a singular look of distress and appeal from the gun to Harry, which made the latter laugh. "Ho, Massar 'Arreo!" gulped out Dick, again turning his head round upon the iron, as if it were a mop; "dis a nubber do, sar—dis Pinchar, dis gun be!"

"Hang Pincher!" was the impatient reply. "Whose cabin is this, eh, Dick?"

"Dis 'e spare larborde fore-cabin on de main-

deck, sar," answered Diamond, promptly. "Nub-buribody slip in dis cabin afore, I b'lieve, sar, but Pincha umself."

There was a previously unwonted degree of formal propriety and gravity about Harry's former *protégé*, apparently gained since his elevation to seamanship in the frigate, along with his quickness and smartness; and it rather surprised young Spencer.

"Well, how long have I been here?" asked the boy, in a sharp tone.

"One—two—dree night," said Diamond, carefully computing on as many dark fingers, as he successively raised them. "Two *day*, sar. Yiss, Mas'r Ispensa, you been dam sick dis time, I guess. 'E sargeon he bleed um putty smart, I b'lieve, sar." And, truly enough, the stiff soreness of one bandaged arm testified to the fact. "'Sides, he send sleepy-drink for you, sar—dat burry mid-shimine which you hab jus' heab down, obber 'e breach of dis 'ere gun, sar."

"So much the better," said the youth. "Why, I seem to have slept long enough, I think. You don't fancy, you stupid fool, it's done any harm to that lump of iron, eh?"

Diamond, however, continued to examine the huge piece with evident concern, shaking his head and rolling the whites of his eyes, or rather their yellows, in a mysterious manner. "I 'e siccond

cap'n ob dis gun, I can tell you, Miss'r Ispensa, ibber since 'e last practice; an' I don' burry moch like um sleepy-drink heabed ober him—him putty libely gun before, else I don't expect he hit um mark so berry well. I not know what Jack Dickson, um cap'n, say, s'pose he hear. P'raps he say dat 'ere sleepy midshimine moch better all down dese young gempleman's troats dan come for spoil Pincha."

"Come, you black monster, no jaw!" said the lad, more peremptorily. "Where's my clothes—hand 'em here."

"Can' hab no more cloves, sar, till 'e sargeon come," was the grave reply, as Diamond calmly sat down on the gun-truck again. The boy started up in his cot and repeated the order with tenfold emphasis, backed by some expressions not all complimentary to Dick's appearance or origin.

There was considerable loftiness in the manner with which the black man stood up and said, drawing himself erect—"Dis here feller not your sarpant, you please for recklect, sar—nor not your black dibble of a slabe for nutting no longer—I b'longs in de foretop an' dis 'ere burry cabin asides, in dis gun's crew, an' ebbry day I draws my grog 'spectably as a able seaman! It my rig'lar duty for take care ob Pinchar here, I can tell you, sar!" And folding his arms with vast composure across

his chest, Dick sat gloomily down again, looking round the state-room with a ruffled air in spite of him, and heaving one shoulder sullenly towards the cot; while he professed to examine the lock and sight-scale of the injured cannon as minutely as if he understood the numerals, and once more lowered his head to glance along it to seaward, as if something had been there to fire at. The indignant reefer threw himself back exhausted, and began to see that a new phase of his follower's existence had been developed.

A slight knock was made upon the half-closed door, and the black topman rose and opened it. It was the tall midshipman, Coventry, who came in, very glad to see his messmate recovered. "The first-lieutenant had made a great row," he said, "about Harry, when the noise in the cockpit was heard; and had soon ferreted out how the thing happened. The captain had ordered the two master's-mates under arrest, where they were still. The captain was so angry with Burt, that Burt was going to be openly disrated and turned before the mast as soon as Harry appeared again. Being only an *acting* mate—that was to say, no better than a passed midshipman, old as he was—Burt might even be flogged if the captain liked. Served Burt right, hang him! 'Twas so precious low of the fellow, too, to hit a light-weight of that age!"

And the big midshipman laughed greatly at the notion of Burt being turned before the mast among the men who had to touch their hats to him before. "He'd have to pull an oar, no doubt, in some boat, instead of steering it—and take 'his wheel,' and tar down rigging! 'Twould really be prime to see him; and every one that could, would lend him a kick. Why, 'twasn't the first time, neither! Burt had been turned back over and over again in navigation, 'twas said, ere he passed—though he was allowed to be a fair seaman: then he had lost lots of chances since—and been nearly brought to court-martial and broke in some seventy-four, for being drunk on duty—and ought to have had his luff's-commission years ago, if he'd been worth his salt, the low dog. Why, hang him, 'twas even said he was married!"

All this, which seemed quite conclusive in the eyes of the tall, curly-headed midshipman, with his easy townish swagger and his light way of thinking, had a different effect on young Spencer as he heard it. He had never thought of this sort of thing about Burt before, though he might have heard something of it now and then. The more he thought of it, the less resentment did he feel toward Burt, and the more he pitied him; so he asked again if it was really likely Burt would be disrated. Coventry thought he was sure to be; the surgeon was to make his report before breakfast,

and at that morning's "divisions," no doubt, if Spencer's account tallied with Little Blakely's, the thing would be done; Mac, the surgeon's-assistant, had told as much to the mess, for even Mac was quite disgusted about the affair, and altogether *set* against Burt.

"The scoundrel—the mean, impudent hound!" exclaimed Harry.

"I say, Spencer, though," said Coventry, thoughtfully, "after all, you know, there's nothing like science. A little science 'd do wonders for you—'twould stick ye on fair ground with such lubbers at once. We'll get the sailmakers to stuff up a couple o' pair of gloves, and if you don't mind a black eye or two at first, I'll give you the whole benefit of what a friend of mine taught me—Jim Crike, that took the belt soon after from Bill Protheroe, the Champion, and killed the young Jew, Isaacs. Poor fellow, he had to cut and run for it somewhere—owing to some mistake, I don't exactly know what it was—but he was a good fellow, was Jim, and had a great notion of me, for what I might do if I only studied. By-the-by, I've heard Jim got to the colonies. I'd like to see old Jim again, some day. But hang it, you know, man, though it's foolish, I suppose—one tires of that regular sort of a life, and besides, it's precious hard to keep in training. Just feel my arm, it's a mere nothing now! You've got pluck,

however, Spencer, my boy, and that's a great deal in the——oh, here's Mac, though!"

The lank assistant-surgeon put in his sandy head and bony features; then came sliding forward with a half-professional half-affectionate look, to see how Mister Spencer was getting on. The boy sat up and gave him a fixed glance, but it was useless; "Mac," as he was called, very seldom inclined to meet one's eye; he only increased his inquiries, sliding-in sundry hints and feelers about the rashness of joking too far, the evil effects of drink, and thankfulness to Providence; while he fawned obsequiously about the cot, and seemed almost to purr over the inmate with joy at his convalescence. Harry turned from him, and asked Coventry to have his clothes sent for. Coventry looked to the medical-assistant; who turned with an imperious command to black Dick, where he knelt by the gun, looking out. "Ole right, sar," replied Diamond, giving his woolly hair a sudden pinch in front, and butting forward very respectfully with his round black head, "dey're here, Mis'r Sis's'n-sargeon—ole here."

"Is the captain up, yet, do you know, Coventry?" asked Harry.

"Oh, aye, Mister Spencer," said the irrepressible under-surgeon, whose visage had really a brassy tint by the morning-light, "I warrant ye the cap-

tain's up, and was asking Doctor Wilson already how you were. He's in his cabin, I'm thinking. There's the pipe going for divisions—he'll be out soon, and then forward goes Mister Burt, or I'm much mistaken—before the mast."

Coventry was looking attentively out of the port-hole. "The wind's freshening," he said. "We're keeping up another half-point—there goes! That's jolly, I say, now!" and he rubbed his hands as a shower of spray came sprinkled towards the gun-port, while the frigate could be felt to rise on fuller swells of the sea, rolling a little to one side as she went cleaving through. "There's the saucy *Astræa* again! D'ye see anything ahead yet, blackie—eh?"

Harry jumped out on the deck, and called to Diamond again for his clothes; nor would it have failed to enrage him at another time, when that singular worthy betrayed so unexpected a degree of barbarian cunning, as he took the tompion from the mouth of the thirty-two-pounder, and extracted the garments in question, article by article; having been ordered, as he alleged, to see that his previous young master did not get up till the surgeon came. But the lad was far too anxious to prevent Burt's disgrace to lose a moment; and no sooner had he dressed in haste, and seized his deck-cap, than he hurried up the after-hatchway, straight up to the

poop-cabin, abaft of the steerage-wheel, where the sentry walked. The marine, having brought himself to the saluting position at sight of a young gentleman — particularly, it might have been thought, of *Mister* Spencer at that time—opened the door with his unoccupied hand, and announced as much to the captain's steward, who was setting breakfast in the largest cabin, while Captain Herbert himself sat writing at the other end.

CHAPTER III.

SAIL-HO!

THE captain looked up at the lad's approach, and seemed to start a little; nor was it possible at first for the latter to tell his errand, so seriously did Captain Herbert inquire about the effects of the injury, and of the doctor's treatment, adding a slight reproof for his appearance on deck so soon in a tropical climate. Indeed, seeing the midshipman turn rather pale after the flush with which he had entered, and look round vacantly, as if he felt weak on his legs—it was in some haste that the captain rose calling to the steward for a glass of wine, and bidding Harry sit on the only couch in the place, that was between the quarter-deck eighteen-pounder and the bulk-head. Meanwhile, he hurriedly paced about, himself; glancing up from deep thought once or twice at young Spencer.

Suddenly he stopped opposite, but at a little distance, and said, looking fixedly at him, "You have come to tell me how this happened, Mr. Spencer. 'Tis unnecessary, however; the account clears you, in my mind, young gentleman, from all blame. I thoroughly appreciate your behaviour in the whole affair, my—my young friend. Methinks I see traits of no common promise, in what I"—here he vouchsafed a look of still higher approbation, almost of proud complacency in the *protégé* he had brought forward; but he checked himself, taking another turn of the cabin-floor—"I mean in one whose general conduct, Mr. Holmes informs me, not only merits his praise, but is satisfactory to the other officers you are known by. As to Mr. John Burt, rest assured he shall have no further opportunity, under *my* command, for these disgraceful brutalities of his to those younger and better bred than he."

Harry rose, covered with blushes; hesitating, yet very eager, he hastened to speak of Mr. Burt, telling what he had heard about Burt's disappointments and disadvantages, and liking for liquor, and his being so far on in life—his good seamanship notwithstanding—and the punishment it would be to him to be disgraced.

"You—you mean, then—ah!—I did not exactly observe—then, what do you wish me to do—to perceive, that is?" the captain said; with a strangely wandering look, after having seemed to

attend with the utmost interest, his eyes bent on the boy's face. "Why, young gentleman," he added, recalling himself rather sharply, "it seems to me severe enough—as *you* will see, perhaps, a dozen years hence, when you know more of the stumbling-blocks and hitches in your profession! What would you have *had*, pray, sir?"

The lad stared and reddened. "I wished nothing more done, sir," he said. "I hoped you'd forgive Mr. Burt altogether, sir, especially as he was a good deal provoked."

Captain Herbert made a quick movement towards the animated young speaker, gazing at him; but again checked himself and turned, pacing towards the other end of the cabin, and looking out of the glazed port-hole, in seeming consideration of the thing. All at once he came forward again, and said, quickly, "At your request, Mr. Spencer, I *will* consent to pass over Mr. Burt's conduct; he shall have another chance. I should think it would have an effect on him to hear at whose instance it is, if nothing else would!"

Harry's face glowed with gratitude he could not express; but there was one more request he had to make, that instead of his being mentioned in the matter, Mr. Burt's forgiveness should come from the captain alone. Mr. Burt and the other master's-mate, he said, had been in fact punished enough by being near three whole days under

arrest; and as for his own part, why, 'twould do him more harm than good to be heard of in the thing again; he didn't want to look like a sort of a martyr before all hands. A confused air might have been seen to struggle on the captain's features, with a disposition to smile, as he eyed Harry oddly and curiously. Outside, under the quarter-deck awning, could be heard the talk of the clustering officers; beyond that, the mustering and hum of the men, with the slight clatter of marines' accoutrements. The thought of facing it all then, or having his name brought up at "divisions," had annoyed Harry greatly; and he saw besides, that if he came out of the cabin by the way he had gone in, the whole ship's company would guess how things stood. So that he at once told the captain so, requesting him to have the goodness to bid the steward let him through the after-cabin, and down to the main-deck quietly again, by the little stair in the quarter-gallery. There was much of the modern midshipman in this shrewd request; and the glance of Captain Herbert showed a sense of it, between surprise and satisfaction. "Steward," he said next moment, with a manner that implied some sense of the serio-comic, "take the key of the quarter-gallery door, and show this young gentleman down to the main-deck."

Returned to his cot, Harry waited till he heard the clash of the marines presenting arms, the in-

distinct voices, the captain's few louder words, then the pipe-down, and the swarming rush through every hatchway to breakfast below. After that, he sauntered on deck himself. There was something in all this that filled his mind with boundless hopes, and made him happy beyond outward accident or temporary monotony; something drawn from the new step towards nearness to his captain, and towards being understood by him. Captain Herbert's character seemed the more to endear him, even the further he was exalted above the least familiarity with the very highest officer on board, living a kind of lonely life, but surely a grand one. His stature, his apparent strength that never needed to be proved, the very homeliness and mildness of his features when at rest—all were in keeping with some boyish old notions of knights and heroes, doubtless justified by certain antique forms in the echoing picture-gallery at Herbert Court, or on Mrs. Brinds' cherished tapestry curtains. True, a sterner shade was not wanting to Harry's hero—it had come out more obviously on the recent occasion, so as to excite for a moment some vague misgiving. Was it eccentricity? Was it a gloomy temper, strongly mastered, yet once or twice imparting a singular vacancy to the clear falcon eye—perhaps a yet more startling gleam, as of an incoherent, meaningless intent that passed aside? In Somersetshire

there were foolish old country legends and idle village gossip, that attributed a hereditary craze, at the very least, to the family at *The Court;* even the solid old oaken staircase and long quaint picture-gallery, with the painted roof full of cherubs and great naked martyrs and quaint persecutors, with the coloured oriel-window all illuminated with apostles and saints—even these were said, of course, to be fearfully haunted on gusty nights when everything would creak!

Harry returned to duty as if nothing had occurred; it was his regular turn among the few on deck while breakfast passed. For but a short time, the captain in his usual manner turned aft on the short poop with Mr. Holmes, seeing far, and clear of ropes or awnings, about the lustrous circle; where another convoy of merchantmen, signalled overnight, still dropped hull-down to the South-West. Captain Herbert set up one foot upon the block of a guy from the spanker-boom above him, and held by the quivering rope while he talked a little as usual, smiling now and then according to his wont. From the distance, Harry might thus watch him unnoticed; but on the other hand, must be content to dwindle back into that speck, among nearly three hundred men, which he now plainly became once more; until chance should possibly favour, though likelier to pass him by. Soon the captain came down the poop-steps alone again, returning

alone within his cabin, which the sentry carefully closed as he disappeared—too grave, or too thoughtful, or, it might be, too unapproachably elevated to seem so much as to notice Little Blakely's startled salute when he stopped on the lee-side, amidst a hurried message from forward to Mr. Holmes.

The stirring news, itself, of a strange sail in sight from aloft—which must have reached the captain's ear ere he retired, and which quickly brought up the very "idlers" ere breakfast in the gun-room was finished—did not for an instant detain his attention; nor did the hoarse bull-voice of Burt appear to have struck him in the least, when the latter—rather speedily, considering all things—snatched a deck glass and ran to mount the shrouds, with some confident assurance or other to the impatient first-lieutenant. It was as if Captain Herbert mechanically hastened apart, almost as if strange sneering doubts might be plausible with regard to his real taste for active service, with habits so quiet as his, formed during years of peace; the cabin door seemed sealed behind him for the day; Mr. Holmes only cast a look at it, and did not appear to venture upon sending in reports of the trivial occurrence now left to his charge. There were airy voices far aloft, a dialogue being carried on between them and louder ones on deck; though the awning at first hid what was done. A

bright blue breeze was blowing; the frigate's lofty spars climbed the sky under all sail, except her side studding-canvas; one tall sheet of which, still damp with the last tropical rain, was at that moment being hoisted out laterally to windward by the main-topmen, in dark contrast to the snowy expanses in the midst.

"Fore-cross-trees, there," hailed the first-lieutenant upward, out of the hollow of his hand—having come off the quarter-deck with no ordinary promptitude, and some degree of excitement; for all suspicious sail, whatsoever, appeared of late to have deserted his horizon.

"Ay, ay, sir," came hoarsely floating down from the foremost look-out-man, whose back at that height was a zebra-like patch of Guernsey frock against the dazzling azure sky: his foreshortened legs were but two dabs of fluttering white, with bare pink flecks of the soles of his feet—as he put a speck of a hand over his warm pink face, to gaze away again, clear of the very uppermost sail under the pouring sunlight.

"Can you *make it out* yet?" shouted Mr. Holmes.

"Ay, ay," was the hesitating answer. "Looms large, sir—like a ship."

"Hang the stupid lubber," growled Mr. Holmes, stamping about; "a little ago he thought she was a brig. Send up another hand, Mr.

Robinson—some man that's not just altogether an owl."

Looking steadily out from the uppermost bulwarks, one could just see a hazy speck on the horizon; whether lessening or enlarging, with one set of sails or more, it was impossible to say. Suddenly the legs of some one in loose ducks were seen to descend abaft the clue of the main-course, out of the main rigging. It was the master's-mate, Burt, who was known to have a specially good eye in his head when quite sober. He had the telescope still in one hand, which he drove together with the other as he got on deck. Mr. Holmes eyed him with some shade of coldness, as he had been so lately released from arrest; but there was anxious interrogation in the glance. "The fact is, sir," said Burt, with rather a gloomier respect than usual, "there's two of 'em—there's been two of 'em, of course, all the while. There's something odd about it, but I suppose they've been both hove-to alongside of each other till the last minute. They're parting company now. I've a notion that one's a brig, and t'other a schooner."

In five minutes more, accordingly, the look-outs aloft hailed the deck, that there were *two* sail broad on the starboard bow, instead of one. Mr. Holmes's spirits now became high indeed: true, the doubtful vessels were well to windward out of the ship's course, and another wild-goose chase might bring

in the end no greater good than had been gained before; nevertheless his general instructions and his personal tastes appeared for once to agree. He had his obvious notions on the business; he had the yards at once braced up as close to the wind as might be, in harmony with these cautious views—and it must have been indeed a very strangely abstracted or dignified captain, who, even from the quietest of after-cabins, did not notice the change. Mr. Holmes kept walking about irregularly, or standing up upon a gun, with one hand always planted behind him in the small of his back, working with a piece of rope-yarn—while, from her hold to her trucks, he set the ship every minute more thoroughly a-buzz in carrying out his plans. So active an officer was he, so full of slight expedients which nothing but long practice could have suggested, to suit the peculiar disposition and habits of the *Astræa* in light weather. The consideration did not for a moment escape him, of what exact spot, fore or aft, the idlers, marines, and unoccupied seamen should stand upon; the sails were duly drenched with a stream of water from the fire-hose, that they might draw the better; and yet he was most careful, while getting to windward as much as might be, not to seem over-anxious to do so, in the eyes of the strangers. A prophetic instinct on the matter was apparently guiding Mr. Holmes. He went so far in his desire to conceal

the man-of-war character, and the fact of a pursuit being intended, as to have two or three of the seizings cut away on each side of the top-sails and top-gallant-sails, where the head of the canvas was fastened to the several yards; their upper corners then fell back in flaps, and at once took away the navy-cut British squareness, making a sufficient disguise so long as the vessels were hull-down from each other.

It was thus amidst a growing stir, not unmingled with obvious self-satisfaction on the first-lieutenant's part, that about noon, even through the glasses on the frigate's quarter-deck, the nearer of the two vessels was perceived to have somewhat changed her course, as if to edge down south-westward with the wind in her favour. The vertical sun dazzled straight down on the narrow surface presented by the stranger's sails in that position, and the slow, glittering swells of the sea often dipped her behind them, with a blazing burst of light it was impossible to look through; yet she seemed ever to enlarge in the midst of it, throwing up a sparkle and a flash at times before her. Accordingly, as Mr. Holmes had an eye to the other vessel also—whose canvas could by that time, from, aloft be recognised as indicating a large barque—it was thought best to keep standing on midway; in the greater hopes of thus gaining a convenient proximity to both of them, if either

vessel were indeed what Mr. Holmes devoutly trusted to find. He was a thorough naval man, and what was called a zealous officer—looking upon enemies, neutrals, and allies, or even the merchant ensign, in a purely technical way, as to be secured or let go according to certain nice points. A smuggler, Spaniard, marooner, or pirate, he by no means abhorred in the manner of some men, but considered them as valuable wild-deer, or things of chase; to pursue which, *unlicensed*, was of course in his eyes a crime. With regard to slavers, the law had not yet cast even so much as a shade upon *their* character, and he had therefore never concerned himself about them. But it did not follow—that if neither of the two sail in sight should turn out liable to forfeit on any ground—there was no advantage to be reaped by speaking with, or overhauling them; true, that they were most likely decent British palm-oilers or slave-traders, jogging under the British ensign—but *something* might be wrong—there might be distress, in which case salvage money would fall due, or if not, if all were well—why, the truth was that the frigate had been a little short of her complement when she sailed from Spithead, and had since parted with two or three hands to her late commodore; so that it would be most natural to press one or two men from each. Mr. Holmes, in fact, had a great turn

for "overhauling," and was all sharpness and contrivance from head to foot, a man that would have been miserable if not carrying out approved devices, or racking his brain for new ones.

Meanwhile, the master had taken the sun's altitude with two of his mates from the poop, and worked out the reckoning, so as to prick out the ship's place at that moment on the chart. He came out of the captain's cabin again with the chart; and, going up on the poop, spread it carefully over a rope-rack there. The captain himself, rather unexpectedly, came out, and followed his sailing-master. The latter was a somewhat antique-looking navigator, made to appear much more respectable than his natural bent, by the uniform; though he wore the flat-sided two-cocked hat negligently, on the back of his head and almost "right-athwart-ships"—instead of "fore-and aft," or "close-hauled," as that inconvenient head-piece was worn by the other officers. A small rivulet of tobacco-juice oozed from one corner of his mouth, and was slowly lost among the lower furrows of his countenance. His legs did not seem shaped for regulation knee-breeches and white silk stockings; the cuffs of his coat were turned up for business; his voice croaked; and as for his face, it had a gnarled, bark-like aspect, that grew rootier toward the nose, with horny eyes which peered out only by turns from a

labyrinth of wrinkles. Some grizzled ends of hair shooting over from above, and a cross-grained look, combined to give the master an air of honesty, experience, and exactitude, with great steadiness and probity united to heat of temper; so that he could encroach and grumble by a kind of license throughout the ship.

"As near as may be, at this moment, Capt'n Herbert," said this official, kneeling on one knee beside the chart, "the ship's on this here spot, sir—right off the Vargin Isles; we ought to sight the peak of Porty Rico a-head of us before very long. There's a broad shoal about a league and a half on our larboard-bow, though it's not very well laid down in the chart."

"Still, I think we may keep on for a little, Mr. Chuck," said the captain, with a slight smile—"at least long enough to see more of this vessel to the eastward. Meanwhile, we are creeping gradually to windward of the other. Mr. Holmes could not easily have managed better than he has."

"'T'll fall calm in less than an hour," croaked Mr. Chuck, discontentedly. "It's the regular forenoon sea-breeze, this is, as prevails al'ays near them Banks, an' accordin'ly falls light to-ward afternoon. It's not likely the fust-luftenant *knew* we was so near the land, Capt'n Herbert—not bein' his line of duty, sir. The barque's nought but a English barque—axing Mr. Holmes's par-

ding—seeing we're well-nigh the sole country whereby barques is built; which, I expect, is Mr. Holmeses's line of duty to know. She's a Honduras timberer, sir—neither more or less."

With that the master puffed himself up in a very self-sufficient, dogmatic style which was peculiar to him, as if he never saw nor heard anything in sea, sky, or ship, at that moment, except the truth; though with the absurd helmet-like effect of his two-cocked hat, worn across the head, and thrown back—not to mention his up-turned cuffs, and his outstanding red ears that stuck out like a lion's—it was less convincing than it might have been. Captain Herbert gave his remark no notice, but attentively examined the chart. By that time the hull of the barque had risen on the horizon, within view from the frigate's decks, at seven or eight miles' distance. The other sail had just been made out, through the glare of light, to be a large hermaphrodite; to wit, in front a brig, a schooner behind, (which was as yet a more favourite rig with Spaniards, colonials, and slavers, than even the schooner pure and simple). The hermaphrodite had, indeed, been rapidly making for the frigate—when, all at once, she was seen to keep off still farther from the wind, with full canvas, in a course much less favourable to the *Astræa's* designs.

"By Heavens, she's off!" ejaculated the first-

lieutenant on the quarter-deck, as he now glanced in some perplexity from one vessel to the other, where their thorough separation became more evident. "She was steering right for us, when she smelt a rat!"

"Why, it's nought but the breeze falling light, Mr. Holmes," the old master croaked. "'Twere sure to fall light, sir, when we neared the land; that there brig feels it first where she is; and now she's fell off a little more, to make the most of it. That's all about it—neither more nor less. She's a Span'ard—or, more likely, a Portygee bound south, from Funchal to Rio."

"Haul down that main-topmast-stu'ns'l, aloft there!" called out the first-lieutenant, vehemently, as if to let out his irritation. "Ready about—pass along the word, young gentleman. And harkye, you little what's-his-name, tell Mr. Burt to come up and see the two long bow-guns clear on deck, here. Odd if I don't make that sneaking fellow speak ere long!"

"Mr. Holmes," all at once said the captain's voice from above, in a quiet tone: and Mr. Holmes went up the poop-ladder directly. "We are losing the breeze fast," Captain Herbert said.

"Yes, sir; we are," was the deferential answer; but with the brisk addition, "that craft to windward is losing it faster, though, sir. 'Tis, in

fact, the best thing that could have happened. As soon as it's calm, she's *fixed;* we can out boat, and send to overhaul her."

"A long pull, Mr. Holmes," returned his commander, doubtfully; "and the more, as it seems probable there is a strong current running against us just now, *with* the wind." The lieutenant instinctively turned to look over the side. The master seized the chart, peering into it and almost putting it to his nose, then looked up with a stare. "True, there is no sign of it hereabouts in any of the charts," continued the captain; "but as it is well known that to the northward of this there is a current setting down from the north of the Gulf Stream to the coast of the Desert; while another, to the southward of where we are, runs almost exactly the opposite way, towards the middle of the Atlantic—why, from mere calculation——Stay!" he broke out, quickly, and with a smile of sudden animation, "there is the best proof of the result *yonder.* You may distinctly perceive the wet counter of the barque glisten, as she lifts in the distance. The white streak of the nearer craft has got plainer instead of fainter, since she tried to edge away; there *is* a cross current, and a strong one——"

"Ah—right on *her* broadside, and only sharp against *our* fore-foot," exclaimed Mr. Holmes. "I see, sir: good—good; in fact, a regular trap for

them both, if we can but use it. Keep her up, quartermaster!"—to the steering-wheel. "Another pull, there—forward, on the lee-braces!"

"'Tis the best course on the whole, Mr. Holmes," resumed the captain, with all due seriousness. "'Twill at all events keep the ship heading, if I am right, toward the inner bight of the current, where *she* gets the least of it; while our *chase*, on the contrary, is making for its outer turn, where she is likely to feel it most."

"Why, *now*," observed the master, with his glass levelled on the supposed prey, "there's every now and then reg'lar flashes off the gildin's about her quarter; I could a'most read her name, Mr. Holmes, if she turned it this way, sir. She's English."

"We'll try that, Mr. Chuck—we'll try it," was the impatient reply. "Why, in this case, sir," and Mr. Holmes again drew towards his superior, "breeze or no breeze, we have a pretty fair chance of the hermaphrodite." The breeze was already falling still lighter than ever. "A calm might perhaps suit best, in fact; for the barque would *keep* a little. They're in concert together—very suspicious indeed." He was turning his hands slowly round within each other—a sign of increased eagerness with Mr. Holmes; while Captain Herbert looked round, and reflected.

"If so, I am afraid," said the latter, directing a

glance on the nearer object of pursuit, "their leader is too acute for us at present; he is falling off dead before it, with both wind and stream in his favour." It really was so, as the first-lieutenant soon agreed. "Really, a quick fellow," admitted his commander in turn—"almost suspiciously so, as you say; though we should not forget that our own appearance must be equally suspicious to *him*. I would not hesitate, Mr. Holmes, were it not that we have something more important to look for the other way, ere long."

Mr. Holmes, with a sharp and sudden recollection, jerked his keen face north-eastward, over the weather-beam. "November—*ah!*" said he, starting, but exhilarated by his thoughts. "True, sir—to-morrow is the first day of the month; we ought to have been nearer the Bahamas ere now."

They stood apart for a minute or two, speaking in lowered tones; for, with suspense and the calm taken together, the frigate's crowded deck was noiseless from end to end.

"The barometer, besides," added the captain, "says no. Join to which, the extreme likelihood that toward the inner bight of a strong current, where the ship would find herself by the time the breeze fails, there may be a dangerous *blind*-shoal to take care of. *Where* lie the known shoals you already mentioned, Mr. Chuck? Somewhere about two or three points before our port-quarter

now, perhaps?" The master pricked off the place again on the chart, and brought it wonderfully near this supposed direction; not without evident surprise at such a guess, in which the first-lieutenant coincided.

One of the rare smiles which sometimes lightened up the captain's gravity was then playing round his lips. "The guess is none of mine, Mr. Chuck," said he, "that there will always be a shoal inside the whirl of a current. I am just as much struck at its exact fulfilment as you are —'tis that of a mere landsman, who never saw blue water. Science is a shore-going affair, Mr. Chuck; the astronomers, the mathematicians, and the old bookish men altogether, do more for us than we are apt to think. I certainly *am* of opinion, Mr. Holmes, that you must now keep her direct to her course. Another time, the good Abbé Horne's shrewd guesses may do more than merely verify the Admiralty's charts. Yes, sir, as soon as you 'make it noon'—let the people get dinner. You are right, both watches will be wanted—we had as well count on heavy weather after sundown."

In the afternoon, as had been expected, a dead calm sank upon the broad waters: miles off to northward, the questionable hermaphrodite had passed beyond reach even of the keenest eye on deck—sometimes hidden altogether from aloft, by the glassy heavings of the dull-blue ocean; having

now shaped a course, however, so steadily bent for the track of the West-India convoy last-spoken, as to be otherwise quite explicable when currents were allowed for. The barque, her consort, indeed, had manifestly been unable to see through this embarrassment: in spite of crowded sail as long as the breeze held, she had steered the wrong way to profit by it, in following an acuter friend; always seeming to grow nearer, to a degree of obviousness that made Mr. Holmes rub his hands again—none the less so, perhaps, because the captain had once more retired. The very calm itself was now acting differently upon the *Astræa* and the barque; slowly the latter shifted her attitudes, as happens in the restless swell of the most perfect calms at sea; the frigate still more slowly turning either broadside, heedless of the helm, yet like a bulk that tended from some under-drift; till the red of a British merchant-ensign, with its radiate corner, was plainly visible at the other's mizen-peak through the glasses. Ere very long, her whole clumsy hull was offered in all shapes to the naked eye, from the bluff bows to the heavy stern, with the boat full of lumber hanging over it—the round-house aft, the smoke of the caboose on deck; the brailed-in spanker and bladdered-up courses, the hanging gaff-topsail and shaking canvas aloft, with white and yellow spars, and slovenly running-rigging, all were singularly clear and as natural as could be, making a helpless dance against the hot north-west.

One man in the *Astræa*—never afterwards popular—was heard to swear he knew the build, and could name the port which the stranger would hail from; two or three were much more commended for the quickness of sight, on which confident assertions were grounded, that in her fore-rigging a blue shirt had been hoisted for a moment or two—as much as to say there were ready volunteers on board. Her regular signals were at all events intelligible on the whole; she offered to send a boat with her papers—the "*something-or-other Anne* of Bristol" was the name which Coventry and the signal-quartermaster reported; in fact the mention of that port agreed curiously with the seaman's previous guess—and she was bound direct from the Guinea coast to the Havannah with a negro cargo. Her consort was a Brazilian, bound the same way with timber and oil.

The calm secured her for the time, it was true, nevertheless the signs of the weather troubled Mr. Holmes: besides that the frigate seemed to draw no nearer after a certain point, and then began to shift and tumble like her neighbour. Mr. Holmes preferred somehow to send a boat himself, and give the barque "a thorough overhaul;" the second cutter was excellent for the purpose, sound and ready, with a crew all on tiptoe for the word to "pipe away"—among whom Dick Diamond was by no means the obscurest man. The first-lieutenant

fixed his sharp eye on Mr. Burt, the most experienced of the master's-mates, and, beckoning him, said a few significant words, that left Burt in a good key on the whole, if they at the same time made him serious. Burt did not seem against allowing any "reefer" whatever with him, who could steer; no matter who, if only to show bygones would be bygones, among those urchins that were edging slily toward the boat over the quarter. One little difficulty alone stood in the way, and this Mr. Holmes lost no time in getting over; he caught young Spencer's petitioning eye as he turned to the captain's cabin, indeed listened to the eager request in passing, and curtly promised to see about it.

"Pipe away the second cutter!" said he, briskly, after a minute's absence. "See everything right in her, now, Mr. Burt—look to the priming of the small-arms, sir, and harkye, be sure no liquor is smuggled down while you're busy aboard the barque with her master. 'Twould seem there's a league between all forecastles whatever, friend or foe, reason or none, to make each other drunk gratis—you *must* have a youngster to leave in the boat—take Mr. Blakely, there, who appears in good health *enough!* But, recollect, you're answerable for him, sir—recollect, d'ye hear, you're *answerable, and consider the weather!*" There was a sudden singularity in the first-lieutenant's manner, and a frown on his brow: Little Blakely had promptly

jumped into the stern-sheets of the cutter, and Burt had lost no time in following. "Ay, ay, sir," he had cheerily responded as they were being lowered away; "no fear in the world of that, Mr. Holmes—I'll be answerable—certainly, sir:" and at a clutch of the bow-man's boat-hook, a fend-off from the coxswain in the stern, they fell under the frigate's counter and were heaved off gloriously with a flash of oars. Harry Spencer stood much annoyed, not a little astounded: "I thought, sir," he ventured to say—but was still more confounded by the sharp set down, "We've no time for all the thoughts of young gentlemen from the cockpit, Mr. Spencer—I certainly mentioned you, thinking no harm of a little extra indulgence in the circstances, by George! But no, *no*, sir—you've quite forgot your late hurt and sickness, it would appear—a close shave upon the edge of brain-fever, the surgeon thought—a wetting at present might have been the death of you, boy, and midshipmen are really precious. Is this your watch on deck at present, may I ask, sir?" And with that Mr. Holmes faced round peremptorily upon Harry.

"No, Mr. Holmes—it is not, sir," faltered the youth; "I come up by rights in Mr. Courtenay's watch—the first to-night."

"Till the first to-night, then," was the summary rejoinder, "you'll oblige me by at once going below out of my sight, and sleeping—looking about the

main-deck, airing yourself out of a port, amusing yourself, anything you please, my boy," added Mr. Holmes, more mildly; but turned and walked straight aft at his swiftest pace, to be troubled no further with such matters.

Touching his cap, Harry had forthwith literally obeyed; bewildered in his mind and sick at heart, he was dropping down the after-hatchway, his eyes being on a level with the edge of the combings, so that he saw past the double steerage-wheel, between the quartermaster and men who stood listlessly by it, and the pacing marine sentry in charge of the cabin-doors: when the steward from under the poop came out by chance, and left the glare of the sky astern to come through and through from the windows. The Abbé Horne's trial-barometer hung glittering and balancing itself nicely in one of the small after-cabins, above the captain's "tell-tale compass" on its stand —with full hanging book-shelves, all luridly illuminated by the light, and a roll of charts among letters on the bright white window-locker, and an open volume laid like fire on the glistening black breech of the carronade stabled at one side—the whole so empty and quiet, one could not help expecting some strange event to disturb it. Truly it was like the effect of a fevered brain, when a tall figure crossed, half seen, from the little state-room—more dazzling white than all the rest, stopping to note

the fallen quicksilver and the shifting mark of the ship's-head upon the compass-box, as if the abbé's spirit were indeed at hand—then hastily leaning through the open stern-port, struck by some object it displayed: it was Captain Herbert himself, who, half dressed for deck, doubtless saw the boat as well as Mr. Holmes did on the poop above. He turned, at all events, with a start; he strode forward under the skylight of the sitting-cabin, looking up at the breathless brazen space—its sudden view appeared to reflect a burning glow upon him, as he hurried toward the open deck, but stopped, pressing both hands to his flushed face and sitting down. His steward, with his fresh-brushed uniform-coat and hat, passed in and closed the outer door; he was to dine that afternoon in the gun-room below, where the cloth was laying with uncommon form, and where Harry, as he paused to look out at the boat arriving aboard the barque, heard the captain's heavy stride to and fro above, as others before had heard it when the place was quiet. Now strangely rapid was the pace this time; again, it still more strangely stopped, grinding a heel in the very planks as it slowly turned, with a loud word or a low groan, which could not have been meant for his steward; in fact his steward was always very discreet—saying at the most, that no barometer could be surer than the captain's walk before heavy weather. Harry looked out of a port in the gun-room and saw that

it was caused, beyond doubt, by annoyance at having allowed the boat to go at all. He chiefly wondered what the captain would have said, if he had suspected the rather rash permission to that special object of his care, Little Blakely. And Harry heard from Coventry, before long, that a "whiff-signal" was sent up aloft to quicken Mr. Burt, over and above the sound of a gun, to which he could not but pay attention.

Before sunset, in fact, the cutter was seen pulling back all safe; the heavy ground-swell rolling west, as into a furnace, made them slow enough; but all was right when they came, and all was dull as ever. Little Blakely hot, no doubt, but the rest hotter; Mr. Burt the only one that flavoured of rum to speak of, and that but slightly, considering. "The barque and her papers were all correct," he said. "She was the *Lively Ann* of Bristol, near two years out, Matthew Owen, master; six weeks out of the Senegal river, with blacks for the Havannah; no need for saying much about that, as one couldn't help smelling 'em, and a black man in the boat had seemed to feel it most. Owen looked a low sort, like his trade, but civil enough, as well as quite open about his consort, the hermaphrodite—she being the *La Juanetta*, that had left the coast with him, commanded by a most respectable Brazilian—in fact, an acquaintance of Owen's own, for whom he

could vouch—'Tonio Gopez by name. They had kept together on account of pirates, in which line they latterly took the frigate to be manœuvring. As to their being actually hove-to alongside of each other when first seen, so near as to have seemed one vessel, honest Owen did not at first recal the circumstance; but afterwards recollected it, he having been asleep in his berth at the time. His friend Gopez had been short of water, and certainly got a cask, also a keg of good French brandy, which he paid for like a Briton. The thing that had seemed to annoy Owen, after his hospitality in his cabin, had been the request to muster his hands on deck, which cost a little time and trouble, they being a scuffy, slouching, hungry-looking set at best, and very sulky inclined; but, in the end, he, Burt, had been able to fix on two—a couple of ill-conditioned, hang-dog fellows enough, at first sight, but trying to look worse than they were." The two men referred to, with their bags and bundles, Mr. Burt had, in short, brought in the boat for good; scarcely to the very high satisfaction of Mr. Holmes, who had hoped for better things, though pleased with the very efficient officer-like conduct and zeal of Burt. The first-lieutenant talked after his fashion to the newly-arrived pair, giving them a little friendly counsel: the one being a short, square, thick-set man with a bull-dog face, who would have it that his name

was Ephraim Malabaster, and his nativity colonial, and that he had never before beheld the gangways of a king's ship; the other, a much lighter-built individual, with thin lips and lank hair, but promising activity and handiness, who, with yet more doubtful veracity, affirmed his title to be John Jones, his birthplace British, and his calling quite unconnected with navigation, he having been a passenger in the barque. By these names they were at all events entered in the frigate's books and watch-bills, and were already assigned their stations and duties: a dull result altogether, nay, almost crowned in dulness by the disproportionate good-humour it had tended to throw upon the spirits of Mr. Burt, who had scarce a word to throw at a dog. He supped heartily, drank his own temperate allowance with zest, and personally slinging his own hammock in the dog-watches, turned in to snooze without much more ado, till he snored but too deeply.

Through all that "second dog-watch," beyond expression dull was the cockpit berth of the *Astræa*. Evening it could not be called, as the dark fell suddenly down the hatchways, without the gleam of a single star; side by side with the gasping "wind-sails" from deck to deck, that seemed like probosces of dead elephants which had searched for water-springs, and now only dropped darkness. The moon was somewhere, no doubt, behind the

still-smoking gloom of the air; the heat of the past day had been specially stored, it was evident, in the cockpit, and came out stronger than ever with the cockroaches; watch or no watch, fellows took all sorts of pretexts to steal unsocially away. Little Blakely pretended not to be tired, and had left his top-shelf *bunk* to whoso liked it, of course finding some cooler corner outside, toward the sound of the water-casks in the hold; even Coventry, who had come down, was seized with an extraordinary fit of thrift, turning over the hopeless chaos inside a travelling portmanteau he possessed, then, after saying he had heard there would soon be more opportunities to write home, began to reflect silently upon crumpled shirts, to pore thoughtfully over fragments of old play-bills, and indignantly to destroy papers that looked like accounts from tradesmen. It was all very far indeed from the most distant glimpse of liveliness; still it was quiet, except for the snores of Mr. Burt; and private, save from two others sitting up in hammocks on either side, playing the game of "poker" over him, with absorbed, though cautious, use of his recumbent form, as of a card-table. Harry Spencer had also taken a sudden thought, desperately resolving to begin a letter home.

The chest-lid of Mr. Burt (one of a very few such privileged conveniences), being long ago

figured as a draft-board, was nearest to the lamp, and the only one left open; for Burt was in no way mean, niggardly, or given to low suspicions. When opened, and fixed up by the props into either till, it offered a desk not altogether to be contemned if used low down from the basis of the deck, to which it was fast lashed—the only desk possible, in fact, to penmen in the cockpit mess of the *Astræa*, who happened to have any friends; and who, on occasions immediately preceding the rare chance of a letter-bag in those days, were more and more getting to relieve each other at the spot as steersmen do, or sentries. No grummet (to hold a bottle with an extra purser's-dip) had yet been fitted to the said lid, though already *spoken* of; the lamp swung most irregularly above that dog-watch; the whole hull of the ship made incalculable motions in the heave of the swell; the cockroaches almost left the lamp, to pry more curiously at Harry's paper, and to try his ink; nevertheless, his purpose was but confirmed by difficulties, and he, before the dog-watch was out, wrote well-nigh as much as would do.

"——I must now stop for the present Time," wrote he, "as 'tis nigh Eight Bells, when I venture to presume I'm *allow'd* to go on Duty *at Last!* Dear Mary there has really been so exceeding few Particulars to mention since the Dutch Governor at the

Cape was thus Setteled as I describe, I can only say we are all well and in the best off Spirits—and know not when this can *possibly* be finish't as we are got into the hurricane Season. But will be sent off, it's likely, by some of the Sugar-ships we're like to fall in with, if not by a Barque now in Sight—by the way, she belongs to Bristol, surely not to any firm I recollect of! How long we may stick in sight of her is unknown, the Weather being Most Detestable—whereby I hope you will excuze handriting or other Defecks. This Blott was caused by a *Cockroach.*

"I would not have you imagine for a Moment, my Dear, through aught I have wrote above, that there is any Unpleasanness from any *whatever* of our officers. Nay with regard to our Noble Captain, I solemmly assure you I feel a Sentiment of Attachment more than ever towards that quarter as He well *deserves*—and was cooly informed by that Fellow, Diamond, that as soon as made fit to be seen, by the Surgeon after an Accident I met with, Captain Herbert himself hastened to the Spot and seemed much taken aback and looked like Thunder, inclining to putt Mr. Burt in Irons at first. (Mr. Burt is one of the Master's Mates and had the Worst of it, and I think now inclines rather to make himself agreeable, being at this Moment bye, and lending his Desk!)

"Dick Diamond I am sorry to state, tho' rating Topman and like to do well, is much too forwardly inclined when spoke to. So far from Him being informed of this Letter, he took the Liberty, after Your's, of making divers Inquiries as regards youre Health as well as Kitty's and my uncle's, with neptune's and the White pony. You should on *no* Account desire your particular Remembrances to him. He seemed to take Advantage of the First-lieutenant sending him to attend on Me while sick, and had the Assurance to say that for the first Day or Two I had been very like *Miss Kate!* more particularly when in a Faint, forsooth! with my Eyes shutt. *Perhaps*—you know, Molly? —with one's cheeks a little feverish? Fancy the Fellow——He actually spoke as if He had admired Her in private and thought I might be the better of remaining in the said State!

"I think the best Thing you can do is to *tell* Kate this! Miss Catherine would appear to be rather chary of her Billets now-a-days. And as to Messages, why, Coventry here might just as well look up and ask Me to send *her* His best Love! You may say at the same Time I don't understand why Captain Herbert inclines to treat Me so distantly, and this same Afternoon next Thing to sharply—unless because She used to affect being so very easy in His company, while any one might have seen with half

an Eye that she would set her Cap at a Post-Captain. By the Way, it's rather a dreary sort of Life after all, is a captain's, and I'd rather be a little While coming up to It! I saw right along into His State-Rooms by Chance, coming down here a little ago —and the dullest old Chamber at Herbert Court an't duller to think of. The King Himself, to be sure, has less Power, but the King can't be so cut off—He's the only One aboard that does not mess with a shipmate. He durst not, I fancy. He could not guess any One saw him, and almost look'd to my thinking as if a Trifle more would have fairly crazed Him for the Moment, merely about having let a Boat go out at all in doubtfullish Weather, with a heavy Swell on—of course after the Whim of refusing the First-Lieutenant a Favour, in that Respect, to Myself." (O! Master Henry Spencer! his critical friends cannot here refrain from exclaiming—what distorted views! what injustice! how like the way of the world on shore!) "I naturally wanted to go, you see, Mary, for a little Pleasure. Sure, the Abbé's Barometer must have startl'd Him, but I hear is an Instrument of Merit, like to be adopted by the Admiralty. I do believe the Cutter would have been straightway recall'd, except for sheer Shame and His Coat being off —as it was, Mr. Burt was too much hurry'd in the Matter. The Question is, tho'—if Aught thus

goes wrong on any more ticklish Occasion, *What* could be *done!* I recollect now, hearing there was a Sort of a *Craze in the Family*—was it not So?

"Not a word of this to a living soul, Mary! There's Something astir on Deck—one may know by the Ship steadying that there's a little Air got up aloft, and in Fact it's now a long Sight easier to handle the Pen, but I must close and be ready to run up at Eight Bells. *There* It goes!——"

CHAPTER IV.

EVENTS LEAD TO REFLECTION ON THE PART OF FIRST-LIEUTENANT HOLMES.

HIGH up in the dark there had been passing breaths of air, from time to time, that began to flutter the uppermost canvas, now at length filling it aloft; so that the frigate balanced herself, and was slowly forging a-head on each vast, smooth, black-blue swell, which creamed horribly out of the night to her sharp fore-foot, spot by spot, with sullen hushes between. There was a moon, that night, somewhere; but the barque was utterly blotted from view. The *Astræa's* ready throngs of men, clustered or ranged at their stations, were shown here and there to the binnacle-lamp or gangway-lanterns, less curious by far as to Matthew Owen's preparations for sudden change, than on the alert about their own; a light shown at the fore-

topmast-head, indeed, having afforded him sufficient notice of movements, regarding which he was either too busy or too ill-mannered to respond. All below was breathless still. The three reefed and tightened topsails stood collapsing, nevertheless, against rope or mast, as sheets of hammered iron set on end might stand; the two brailed-up curtains of the courses hung green and spectral beneath (like two shrivelled rows of cherubs watching on a tombstone, wing to wing—each row with a big-uddered Fate amidst it: where some had used to see but a pair of tall, bosoming graces, that trod in succession after the white *Astræa*'s figure). Doleful, too, and awful, was the labouring sigh of the ocean itself, which rose irregularly at times into a mighty sob, then died loud-drawn away, subsiding in a mere dreary wash of waters past the working rudder.

She had full steerage-way, however, and was speedly trimmed to use the little wind that came as yet. Direct easterly it came; the black eastern quarter, in fact, threatened what was to come after. Taken with the set of the currents—tending, as ascertained, toward land—no very hopeful prospect seemed to lie before her for a dark night, with heavy weather, off the mazy archipelago of banks and shoals round the Virgin Isles. Lieutenant Holmes had other views, nevertheless—and this so manifestly from a source above himself, as

not to hesitate at taking in all lighter sail, whenever the chief canvas fairly drew. Even when the puff began to come in earnest, as it appeared, he still kept his usual coolness on emergencies, to make the best of what was allowed him in edging off to opener waters. Once or twice, indeed, he looked silently to Mr. Chuck, the master; once or twice he turned short upon his steps toward the door below the poop, and eyed the doubtful streak along the north-west, as if it signified little after all—though the heat of all Cuba and Jamaica lowered beyond it—in comparison with the actual squall they buffeted.

True, the squall was short; it left only a good top-gallant breeze, though with a quick sea still running in its track. And Mr. Holmes was throwing a scrutiny of some slight disdain on the weather-signs, still most incomprehensibly obscure to north-westward; combining with this an upward glance at his bare royal-masts and "stowed" flying-jib—when the figure of the bark, *Lively Ann*, under a crowd of canvas, studding-sails and all, was all at once made out some few miles off, against the northerly tail of the "clear" on the horizon. A thing to suggest many thoughts—some of them irritating ones; since it was evident that the barque was far from where she *ought* to have been, and had certainly made the sharpest use of the late obscurity—mere chance having now brought

the two within sight again; besides, while a frigate wore short sail, here was a barque carrying sky-scrapers! But all such thoughts were lost in concern, when, quite abruptly, she was observed to fall over aslant, as if to a sudden blast — sails clued-up and flying, spray breaking over her. The breeze was only light in the top-gallant-sails of the *Astræa;* the crests of the seas were softening; the moon was up behind the eastern clouds; the Atlantic weltered out wide that way against their grim breast, inky-black, but at last apparent.

"'Gad, sir," cried the marine-officer, springing down from off a gun under the aftermost hammock-nettings, and letting fall a night-glass he had caught, "she's aground; she's got herself bumped upon a reef, or something." And so it was: lights were seen to flit about the barque's lower rigging, but sputtered out in the gleam of the sea; a mast was cut away; then another fell; the third was shorn in the midst; till there remained but the indistinct wreck, tossed up, and leaning against the white specks that flickered towards it.

Captain Herbert had stood fixed in act to descend the poop, toward Mr. Holmes; whose appealing look had no sooner obtained sanction by one startled gesture, half-involuntary though it might be, than the wheel of the frigate was already shifting at the first-lieutenant's sign, like the will of an eager creature that had waited for this; the

ropes were running from the hands of the sail-trimmers so quickly, the forward-yards were swinging so promptly with the lifted tacks and sheets, as to show how well the crew agreed with Mr. Holmes. The ship flew round, and let fall her lower canvas, sliding straight from swell to swell, toward the luckless merchantman which served now as a beacon, with broken snowy lines all blending on either end of her, and frothing round into breakers as she settled on the reef or shoal. A rocket was sent up by the frigate; a blue-light was burned, drawing a weak powder-flash or two in answer from the barque, throwing lurid reflections from the water's glassy indigo to the dull belly of the greenish cloud above; but, most of all, disclosing within view of Mr. Holmes, if he desired it, the two singular countenances of the pair of "pressed men"—who had been taken as the very best belonging to the *Lively Ann;* and of whose alacrity or whose wariness, if not their seamanship, Matthew Owen might a little ago have been much the better. It was hard to say, from the expression with which they had looked to each other at the first alarm, whether their late shipmates were worth saving or not, or whether these would be particularly good company to bring aboard; still less to understand, from their admissions, how many negroes were involved in the disaster, and if any passengers had really been hidden on the slave-deck or down the hold.

Not many minutes had been required to lessen, by near a half, the computed distance from the scene of this catastrophe, when again the light air failed the *Astræa;* her great topsails wavered once more, and, with a sigh, came wafting back to the masts: but now the bowsprit of the wreck could be made out, and what was left of her fore-rigging, clustered black with men—the very slaves seemed to have broken out—a wild cry might even have been thought to come along through the hush of the breeze. The boats were being manned, almost before Mr. Holmes gave the word to pipe away—a minute more, and the first would have been lowered. "Keep the men steady, Mr. Courtenay," said the sudden voice of the captain, low, but firm. "No crowding, no hurry, pray, sir. I observed a man push one of the barge's crew aside, and jump over into his place—order that man back, under close arrest." The captain had stood above, on the same step of the poop-stair since his foot touched it; he had been fixedly looking to leeward, at times far wide of the all-absorbing object; he was trying to listen now, and held up his hand for the silence which ran from beneath his eye along the decks.

The hurtling sound as of battle high up in the topmost darkness—as of galloping squadrons and of chariots coming towards each other in endless array—passed far above the mast-heads. It seemed

to fall nearer; it sank and was still. A star or two looked down for a moment, out of the keenest midnight blue, and then there came a wallowing eddy about the rudder, and jerked the wheel in the men's hands, but was gone with a long gurgle.

"Hold on with the boats, Mr. Holmes," was the final order, in suppressed tones. "Hold on all, sir—let the men come in to their stations." The word passed; they stepped on board quietly, though gloomily, all to their former places. "It is too late, Holmes—they are in their Maker's hands," quickly added the captain. "The wreck may hold out for a—a time. Brail up and clue down everything—ready with the topsail-halliards, and have the three sails *close reefed at once*,—keep the jib-sheet free." Mr. Holmes had cast but a single glance at the north-west, and seen the peremptory truth—next moment all on deck and aloft was one swarming, flying fulfilment of the orders he took up.

The sharp streak that had lengthened around the fluctuating north-west, had begun at last to kindle and rise; it was lifting a ragged glare, right opposite that quarter whence the squalls had come. Against it, as beneath the corner of a bridge in Erebus, the foaming wreck was shown plainer than before; the frigate's topmen and reefers were not off her yards, ere the remnant of the unhappy barque was pressed aslant before a burst of hissing light, and heaved almost erect

again, and beaten down and held until lost to view. The crowded weather-shrouds of the *Astræa* herself, leaning wildly over, still sloped as if she lay on her beam-ends already, with loose canvas driven into the rigging; the first force of the blast pinned men there, they turned into the sail for breath; the big convulsive wave, flashing up her lifted side, seemed sweeping bodily away with her into the coming trough of the sea. "Let the ship fall off two points, quartermaster," a trumpet-voice had called, however, in good time; for in the confusion and the blinding glare, they had not very well known the direction of the tempest till it was on them. The captain, as he spoke, had sprung to look in at the binnacle compass-boxes. "Bring her head *here*, my man—due *east-nor'-east* if you can, Jackson," he had said to the straining weather-helmsman, a well-known herculean fore-topman—"and keep her there. See well to the *jib*, Mr. Courtenay—let the jib-sheet be eased up as the sail flattens! Mr. Chuck, will you go forward yourself, sir, and quicken them at that foremost storm-staysail—only show the *head* of it unless she hangs in the wind, then clap force on it. *I'll* take care of the spanker; but mind your footing, Mr. Chuck—hold on! *hold on! Here it comes.*"

Heeling over till her lee-gunnels were a-wash with the foamless black surge she sheltered,—half rising again—then heeling as before, so that an ill-secured

gun or port-hole would have settled her fate—the *Astræa* profited, nevertheless, by the timely expedients to relieve her. She fell slowly off before it, till it came upon her quarter; then she leapt well-nigh erect, and felt the impulse of her high main-topsail as they ran it up,—staggering men, that fell successive from above upon the rope, if but to check their way over the floundering mob of marines, who slid round with the tail of it to the lee-scuppers. One long cleave she made, and rose, and bounded groaning from it, scarce fast enough to leave the fierce, swift masses of wrinkled billow shorn crestless by the tempest, flinging their loose surges after her, hissing the sharp "spoon-drift" of their malice on her very quarter-deck. The first hollow roar of that howling blast was as if the darkness had hid a lion, springing sheer upon her, borne away in the flight—the white jaws still at hand, the hot breath lit yet by the angry glare; while its prolonged, throbbing thunder shook and pressed her ever more as she swept on.

Stripped at length to the single main-topsail and one low storm-staysail, she was kept dead before it; but the sea ere long ran high as well as quick, the storm rose by midnight to a hurricane, after which some anxious time was past, with signs rather threatening increased violence than otherwise. Only by the peals of thunder that broke nearer, even through and against the sound of the gale, it

seemed there were reserves of storm in the power of nature—further capacities, too, of hearing and endurance in men; the lightning that rent up the night came in swifter succession from leeward right a-head.

"This is something uncommon, sir," panted the veteran master to Mr. Holmes, from the lee of the binnacle as they stood, each deck-officer holding on near his place, both watches of the crew sheltering at their stations; the Captain, from beside the wheel, doubtfully eyeing the fitful crests of the pursuing seas, that combed on high, and sometimes were terribly near ere they sank. "This is unnatural weather," gasped Mr. Chuck—"it shifted at first, God knows how many points all at once, right into the nor'-west. It looks to shift again, I'd say, else we're running dead *into it*—I've heard o'such whirlwinds; I've known a line-o'-battle-ship lay-to in desperation, Mr. Holmes, sir, and some'ow lump through it, though to be sure she lost her masts."

"If the main-course would only bear it, Chuck," returned the first-lieutenant by the help of the palm of his hand at his mouth, "I'd rather keep her lifting before it, but—but——" he peered up at the dragged lower corners of his solitary reefed topsail, spreading a livid crescent from the gleam of the wet main-yard—then shook his head.

The Captain stepped across to them: "Think

you really, gentlemen," asked he, in a quick voice, "that she could be brought head-to-wind *at once?* Mr. Chuck's notion tallies singularly with the facts —with what I have before heard, myself, of currents aloft as well as beneath. We *may* be running into it, Holmes—we may even have been crossing to its heart, since her course was altered. Certainly, there seemed a lull in the last watch—whereas, now it grows worse than ever. The point is, to wear her round surely enough, and *smartly!*" They stood together for a few seconds, pondering it and watching for the most favourable opportunity—while the fit men were picked and placed, with strong tarpaulins ready lashed, and with lanyards rove to clutch them up along the bare after-rigging, to help the scanty canvas aloft in swinging her from the trough of the waves to face the blast.

Some few thrilling moments there were—chosen at the comparative lull between those throbs of the hurricane, as the frigate swam safe up from another of the hideous *third*-waves, so curling but so vast in their recoil—when her turning bulk appeared to falter for want of sail aloft. Hours of wild possibility they might have been, fit to make the head of a man grey at his prime—so nobly wistful did the ship's endeavour look at the instant, so dumbly willing, so peopled and full of the trained busy hardihood of three hundred brave hearts and more: the very trumpet at the sten-

torian lips of the first-lieutenant failed for breath, or else for more instruction, on a point too rapid to leave him time. It was by one anticipatory sign, with the imperative gesture following close upon it, that the *Astræa* was saved from certain ruin—when, with a single backward rush of heaped men they dragged up the rings of the mizen-staysail on its slanted bar of rope: the grey triangle of soaked canvas shuddered to the storm, for but a moment. It was gone the next—blown like a puff of smoke from its frame, with the crack of half the upper mizen-mast itself, a thrashing wreck, that promised more damage round it. Still the ship flew up to the wind's eye and was saved for the time. She rose and fell bow-on to the waves and to the tempest; her helm meeting her and let fly a-lee, the head-yards being braced up sharp, the best fore-storm-staysail set low with a reef; the strong new close-reefed top-sail edging singly to the full force from on high, where midway it stretched athwart the naked spars—bleak, misty, livid olive with the passing luridness of the hurricane that showed upon it alone, as the peak of some mountain appears to wear the unceasing swiftness of clouds that are elsewhere invisible.

On that new topsail's soundness, truly—on its lasting tenacity—the excellent boatswain of the *Astræa*, Mr. Rankin, counted much; for he had treasured it with severe and jealous care, and produced it with pride when required the day before,

as the barometer foretold the need to change every-day suits for best ones. Notwithstanding which, the first-lieutenant left nothing now to chance; he was busy providing against it, as well as contrivance might, in weather that for the time put out of the question all going-aloft. Once, out of the uppermost blackness above, zigzag to their very lee-side, the blue levin-bolt had glanced across the main-truck, slitting up the raging chaos from cloud to cloud before it blinded them—happily showing all still secure, and seeming about the last of the fierce flashes that laid the sky bare behind a mountain-wave or two. More than once, the fallen hamper of the mizen-topmast endangered the rudder, till it was managed to be cut away; the ship required constant care, rolling laboursomely as she did. As it was, at the great critical moment, two green successive seas had thrown their crests on board from a-beam, washing ropes and men forward together to the break of the forecastle; the second time, three of the waisters, who fancied it was over, having been lifted off their feet and swept over to leeward, beyond the very name of hope. Already two of their names were ascertained, through men belonging to the same messes,—James Wilson, ordinary seaman, a good hand and hearty fellow, cook at the time to *No.* 7, *starboard*—and Jacky Cree, second-class gunner's-boy, boy to *No.* 1, same watch. The third, oddly enough, being

quite unknown to any one on deck of either watch, where people were too busy to ask further.

Mr. Holmes relaxed no effort, and betrayed no misgiving if he felt it; not a man or officer had flagged from his post; the fearful lightning seemed at all events to be blown away by the sheer solid strength of the shrieking wind: and "if nothing more were pitched or rolled out of her, she might very likely face it out with battened-down hatches, till it moderated enough, at least, to scud once more before it." With hopeful assurances to this effect, Mr. Holmes, from "forward" where he remained, despatched a ready and sure-footed midshipman to Captain Herbert behind the wheel. As to all mere distinction of cockpit claims, or respect of persons even above that rank, these had totally ceased for the present with Mr. Holmes; and if Cobbinshaw's slouching legs had not failed him several times that night, or poor eager Little Blakely not been drenched, hurt, and carried below before the worst of it, why, either of them might have chanced to be at hand as well as young Spencer. Harry it was, at any rate, who performed the errand. He made his way, dripping but steady, along below the booms to the comparative shelter in which the captain now stood—as commanding spirits may duly do, after the battle begins to turn. He was still anxious; but as the lad balanced himself in his haste, rather holding

his cap down than touching it, though he tried—there came something like an inclination to smile on the watchful features of Herbert; partly, perhaps, at his chief officer's rather qualified message of encouragement. He even recognised Harry in that trying hour, and looked for an instant from the main-topsail to the "reefer;" with a sudden kindly warmth in the clear eye, never yet before vouchsafed to him.

"Very well, Mr. Spencer—return to Mr. Holmes and say, I hope—yes I do hope the heart of the wind is about broken. Stay!" he added, "I have been thinking of a thing that might be tried. Something very like an old idea of Commodore Byron's, you may say to Mr. Holmes—which I once heard mentioned, though I believe never as yet proved. I now wish him to lose no time in doing so! Let the best-bower cable be at once brought up on the main-deck, taken to the lee hawse-hole there, ready stoppered at about fifty-fathom range, and payed out to its full scope alongside—you understand me, young gentleman? The *lee* hawse-hole, mark me—down on the main-deck?"

"I do, sir—yes," in full faith did the boy hasten to answer; though it might have been equally so with him, if the anchor itself had been to accompany the action required.

"Veering it out as clear and as quickly as may be with its own weight—the back-wash of it to the

lee-bow will be no trifle at first, till she begins to profit by it! At the free end, a line may first be made fast—taken if possible round outside to the foremost port-lid, and payed out there as the cable runs off. One of the master's-mates must go down in charge—let the coil in the tier be well cleared to run free. *You*, my boy?—yes, you may ask Mr. Holmes to send *you*—giving you a couple of good men down to the cable-tier—lose not a moment!"

The keenest glow of gratitude and affection joined with the proudest sense of all that was in question, to quicken the lad's steps as he sprang away; swung forward from one belaying-pin to another, as the frigate pitched and caught herself again. Five minutes more, and he was far down in the fore-hold with a lantern, seeing the cable clear; while Burt in the bows of the main-deck was having it veered out a-head, in grim fulfilment of orders by which he had seemed to set no great store. But from the lowest depth of the ship to the bleakest exposure of her fore-deck, all were soon conscious of a change so speedy, so much for the better, as to appear next thing to magical. She rode with the flickering, wavering coils before her, as with a net for the shattered surge—a springy breakwater, that by turns streamed off or came eddied round to windward; so that the cataracts of spray over her forecastle were broken, she pitched or rolled less abruptly, the helm met her

more surely. Thus head-to-wind, quickly falling-off and coming-to, the *Astræa* showed for hours but a single corner of her towered battlements to the gale and sea—that corner the strongest and the sharpest. One ever-rising mountain seemed to swell from beneath her, with a baffled effort to shake her sideways off into the valley, and pass on: the sheeting torrent of glaciered Alps, beyond, from the drifted snow and darkness, was ever plunged below her vaulted bulk; while fathom by fathom she gave back, indeed, from the striding hurricane, yet clasped and wrestled with it along the height, kept by it, held to it, from off her knees or raised aslant; —as of old, when man and spirit once strove together until morning. The morning-watch brought in some change; by that time, the masts were less in danger, the storm-staysails could one by one be unreefed and raised, and the starboard-watch of the crew, whose turn below it was, might safely be spared. As Harry Spencer belonged to the larboard, he remained of course on deck.

Grand—grand night! To have spent which, was worth whole dull years ashore. Under one, at all events, like him who commanded the *Astræa!* Ay, under others too, whose merits had *come out* then—not Mr. Holmes alone, but worthy old Chuck also —and Lieutenant Courtenay—even young Dalby, with his scented pocket-handkerchief and his curly hair! What a heart-of-oak had been proved in the cross-grain of Rankin the boatswain—the heathen

of a gunner himself had evidently his good points—and the long-faced carpenter, too ready perhaps with his axes at the first brunt, who now confessed, at least, with less of his over-pious manner, that all below was still tight as a bottle—so that more time might be had than he had originally supposed, for their general preparation for a long eternity. As to Bob Jackson of the great larboard watch, captain in the fore-top and of the larboard maindeck thirty-two-pounder named *Pincher*—seeing how he had led the way in clearing the wreck of that mizen-topmast, the question whether he had more muscle or nerve was now so hard as for ever to endear him! Sleep was a mere trifle to Harry, after having had so much of it for three whole recent days on end. Mr. Holmes himself only left the deck for a minute or two under Lieutenant Courtenay's charge, and that merely as far as the entrance to the Captain's cabin, where the steward poured him a tumbler of wine. To the whole watch, the "main-brace was spliced" for the first time that night—spliced very strongly indeed, as every present mid-shipman seemed to prove with personal relish.

Daybreak could not have been far off, when the gale began to moderate to something like ordinary violence: it soon allowed of more low canvas being shown, and of the reefed fore-topsail being loosed and set, one clue at a time. Thereupon, the dead lee-way from her proper northerly course being a consideration for the *Astræa's* future ob-

jects, she was cautiously brought off the wind again, and bore up to north-east under short canvas—the strength of her larboard watch alone sufficing for it all. Steadily leaning from the blast, she drove at it once more, close-hauled on the larboard tack, and heading to the main Atlantic. Still, over the high weather-bulwarks rushed the throb and thrill of the wind; dry it whistled through the netted shrouds, and made the tight-drawn clues of the topsails hum to it, while far to leeward went eddying such vague shapes, such faint wild echoes, as might come from ghosts of the drowned. On a sudden it was dawn. Young Spencer started from a mere momentary rest against the after-end of the booms, amidships: Mr. Courtenay seeming to have just turned slowly on the quarter-deck, with an eye upon him; every wearied group or separate watcher appearing to glimmer out at their places, to a rolling, tossing dawn of glitter and of gloom, that weltered from the western darkness, under seamed and outstretched clouds, whose chill steadfast eastward faces looked like watchers also—watchers that had fallen dead rather than asleep upon their posts. The binnacle-lamp, untrimmed and waning before the pale-green doors and hanging buckets of the poop—the listless marine-sentry, the winking quartermaster and staring helmsmen; all looked close at hand and foolish under a distant lamp-like star, the last of the night, which seemed

to have been alone waking. As it, too swiftly, vanished to meet the morning, the boy could have fancied—though it was impossible—that he had dreamt, that they had all dreamt of greater things, and been near to most astonishing events. The second-lieutenant, Mr. Courtenay, only proved his unbroken vigilance by ordering one reef out of the topsail, which set every one astir; Mr. Holmes was up himself next minute, and approved the action, merely extending it to all the reefs, and adding that the main-to'-gallants'l might be set.

Up behind the "bunt" of the foretopsail-yard, seeing his few men in from their share of this slight business, Harry could not but confess to himself that he recollected a dream of unquestionable vividness and singular *apparent* length (the understood fact being, however, that people may dream years in moments). First, the good Abbé Horne, seated quietly at his well-known work-bench in the old library, before his model ship, was carefully sticking huge pins right through it, as if it had been a live cockchafer he wished to preserve; at the same time wearing such a sinister expression as must have characterised the ancient wizards, when they treated waxed images of human beings in like manner. The abbé, from the midst of it, had coolly beckoned to Harry to hand him up something or other from the fore-hold; on coming up, in fact, he had perceived it was really

the "Count," who made a snatch at him—but all of a sudden proved to be his old colonial skipper, Itefell Dodge, of the *Dove* schooner of Nantucket, screwing the same gimlet-eye as ever at the horizon, while ordering him once more to grease the masts aloft. The abrupt start, at awaking, had been produced by a seeming touch from the thumb of that awful American, which Harry had cause to believe was real in itself, however: some one from behind the launch on the booms had certainly skulked behind, uttering his name in a respectful enough style, and trying to draw his attention in a cautious way, such as brought to mind Dick Diamond's manners. At this present moment, Dick himself was more conveniently within reach; having shown special zeal to relieve the foretop, and now being the last to leave the yard, no look-out man having yet been stationed there for the day. He had thought, for a little, that he made out strange sail to leeward—more than one of them; and the midshipman sharply waited for Dick's results as he was hoisted higher with the sail.

The up-gushing crescent of the dawn ran round and kindled beyond the ridged deep, with surging hollows of glossy shadow athwart its writhing mounds of indigo—fretted, and churned, and foam-flecked—or, with sudden slanted trough and trench, right through into the sunrise. The brightness was dazzled back, till it would have

blinded an eagle; from eddied fire and washing purple to streaked opalescent blue and sharp-edged curves of emerald. The silent clouds, indeed, woke up aghast with joy; as if an angel came out and told them speechless mysteries, then rose beneath his uplifted flaming sword, and flashed full day upon the waters.

Nothing was visible there; nor well could be, till too late to reflect honour on the zeal of Dick Diamond. At a hint, which was rather peremptory, considering his entire freedom in the service of the British Crown, the black seaman came down somewhat crestfallen. The disclosures in the power of Dick, however, turned out by no means to have rested alone on his alleged vision of strange sail; he owned to having really sought a previous audience of this kind from Mr. Spencer: for which, in his view, secresy appeared quite as essential, as it was unbecoming to a sense of proper position in the young gentleman of the *Astræa*. Rapid as Dick's statement, therefore, had to be, it did excite some unexpected interest in the breast of his late young master and quondam fellow-adventurer; for, by a coincidence perhaps susceptible of the most natural explanation, it seemed to point strangely to the same favourite quarter in which his dreams had terminated.

On the previous evening, just after the unhappy barque had been given up to destruction, those

two pressed men from her crew had been separated by the first shock of the hurricane; the sturdy fellow who called himself Ephraim Malabaster, native of the colonies, having been already assigned to the larboard-watch, then sprang aloft "like a good one," and did his part well in getting the foretopsail furled. The other, self-styled John Jones, from Cardiff, Wales, had remained with the marines by the ropes below; active though he might be in general, he had plainly taken the fate of his friends much to heart. The two did not meet again, seemingly, till the frigate's first risk had passed, when she fell off before the blast, after heeling to her very beam-ends. It was while holding-on apart by himself in a pitch-dark corner, that the said "John Jones" had got a glimpse of the so-called "Ephraim Malabaster" trying to coil up a rope, and had crept along to him, putting his mouth to his ear with a shrill voice, in the belief, no doubt, of being heard by Ephraim alone. Close by, however, to leeward, in the dark—having slid down in the shelter of the foremast, by a rope that led there—had hung at that moment Dick Diamond, invisible to the keenest eye, *unless* (as he implied, with a side-gleam from the whites of his eyes,) he had "show a least leg ob dis dashed No. 7 canvas!" "'Golly, Jack!" had *skreeked* "John Jones," according to Dick, "ain'rt ole 'Bijah done for, dat a fac'—ain'rt *he!*" "'Dis *you*, be't, ye 'farnal

beggar, ye?" had "Ephraim Malabaster" returned, (*jowling* out at him like Neptune, at home, over "him beef-bone")—"to de bad place wis he an' you too! Wish him bloody skipper was but slung roun' boff your neck', a da *same mess*, down ter blue blazeses!" Then "Jones" had got nearer again to "Malabaster," *slubbery-ways about his hands*, but very soon jumped back and squeaked, "Kim-kim, Jonesey, ole boy—dis am too bad—us boff a da same boat, for sure? Mush more better off aboard here, *we* is—wot signify ole 'Bijah to dis coon, or skipper eider for dat matter!" "'Tell yer wot, be off, Joshypat B'laster!" the other had roared, "'or watebber be de bless'd man-handle ob yer—I dam' sorry I ebber——" Here a rush of men to ropes on the forecastle had parted them, and brought down Dick; nor had he seen anything of them since: but all through the night a thought had been breeding in him, too big for suppression now.

In the cutter, alongside of that unfortunate barque the preceding afternoon, Dick had indeed suspected nothing; the unquestionable proximity of a whole crowd of blacks, at the time, had doubtless been too repulsive to allow other impressions; though once or twice more than one voice on deck had struck him queer, he confessed, and the long figure of the barque's master, Matthew Owen, had attracted his eye for a moment as they

pulled away home; but Owen had stood too unsuspectingly forth to confirm the unlikely notion; the sun being also in their eyes, and Mr. Burt very smart about keeping stroke with the oars. Nevertheless, "'Bijah Hyme, wicked ole 'Bijah, Cap'n Dosh' fuss'-mate aboard dat berry same bressed *is*schooner, *Dubb* ob Nantucker!"—such was no less than the detested being who had risen, ghastly and dripping, to Diamond's fancy in the night, by help of those somewhat trivial after-facts—very insufficient buoys indeed, in Henry Spencer's view, for keeping so big a scoundrel afloat. In the possibility of Abijah Hyams *dying*, still less of his drowning, the Krooman manifestly did not believe; Mr. Hyams had been to him a more dreaded oppressor, with his hanging black hair, his snaky black eyes, and his well-cut swarthy features that were always working about to some purpose, than even the everlasting thin-lipped Captain Ahithophel himself, whose swallow-tail green coat had ever been flying, and his wrinkled boots moving, behind the gimlet weather-eye which Harry Spencer abhorred. Actually, on the other hand, Diamond was fondly *afraid* that Captain Dodge in person might have been there, to share the alleged fate of his deputy; or that, if more probably at head-quarters in the safer hermaphrodite, the hurricane must infallibly have ensured his destruction in the end. It was useless to say there were, in all likelihood,

many Abijahs among the colonial rebels; the black topman was stubborn in a conviction which, to say truth, the midshipman could not keep himself from sharing.

Much had occurred, however, to raise the latter above such mean remembrances or enmities; the resentment against Skipper Dodge was all but dead in his mind by that time; as for attempting to gain prominence before the first-lieutenant's eye, by bringing up so fruitless a conjecture at present, he heartily scorned it. The secresy which Dick had so very properly reserved for the ear of a patron, was imperatively enjoined upon him still; nor did it appear beneath mention to him, that the *real* "Jones"—of the two men below—was evidently a desperado of that kidney which rendered his enmity unadvisable without good proof.

Yet, scarce were the hammocks piped-up on deck, and the stir of muster before breakfast gone afoot, when an incident took place to throw a strong light on Dick's curious hypothesis. The man entered as John Jones came aft to the gangways, requesting speech of Mr. Holmes, and volunteered the confession that he was in reality a free citizen of the Thirteen United States, by name Jehoshaphat B. Malabaster, entitled to all the rights of the new national flag; which, on inquiry, he stated to be (correctly enough, it proved, as at the time he had left America) a pine-tree

with a rattlesnake coiled round it. The lost barque had been really a British slaver, taken by the brig-schooner or hermaphrodite, to which he in fact belonged; the former ill-fated vessel having still contained "several of the old-country pipple *on* it"—one a passenger, the rest men and mates who had refused to "ship for the new flag." Matthew Owen was the master's real name, but he was safe enough, a close prisoner *on* the hermaphrodite, "havin' fitt some," as the informant phrased it; that was to say, having resisted a good deal before the capture, which had been "done pretty toll'able smartish"—meaning that it had been a surprise to Owen notwithstanding. Jehoshaphat was frank and candid in the extreme; he revealed that he had been indeed absent from the scene of "the troubles about Noo York city," namely, "for some year and a half *on* a S'uths'y whaler"—but as steward, "nuthin' whatever more"—when induced on his homeward way to cruise with the hermaphrodite. The sole cause of his deceit hitherto had been, in short, his bodily terror of John Robinson, the shipmate who had been pressed along with him by the *Astræa's* cutter. Robinson, he now decidedly stated, was a Britisher and no mistake—a deserter from a king's ship, of which he, Malabaster, had at that moment forgot the exact name; and, above all, "a critter of the most determined resemblance to a *b'ar*, with a streak of the alligator; he had

fitt like death against his own nation since he'd cut the connexion," and "knew a sight more of the 'maphrodite and its skipper" than Malabaster did himself, "well deservin' to a swung for't ere now, on some accounts!"

Mr. Holmes had listened with imperturbable attention to this narrative, which was poured forth in a very singular manner, between snapping and snuffling. When it seemed at a close, he looked sternly about for the other man. "Is this Robinson on deck?" asked he, stepping a little forward. "Pass the word below, there, for John Robinson—alias John Jones."

"'Tain't much use, Lieutenant Hollums," observed the colonial-man, recovering tranquillity after an uneasy glance from his shoulder. "I just calculate I made sure of that before speakin' up. 'Twere he that went a-missin' o'board last evenin', with the rest of 'em. He won't answer, *I* guess, mister: no, I knew 'twere the same man, whenever I heard how he sank—didn't strike out nohow like t'others, nor so much as once threw up his arms."

A silence had crept along through the gathering men; they drew in their breath together with a hiss, as they listened towards the fellow. Out of the midst of it, the First-lieutenant's white-hot indignation broke upon him: "Mean, white-livered hound! begone—down to the coal-hole—to the

cook's slush-barrels—anywhere out of sight, as long as there's no poison in his reach! Put him among the sweeper's gang, corporal!—oh, no want of swabs at present, they say, do they?"

He turned his back finally on Malabaster; who, though somewhat amazed, was not by any means struck dumb; indeed, he drew up his craned, eager neck, with an air; and first throwing a spread hand toward the flags hung to dry in the mizen-shrouds, jerked his other thumb swiftly backward to the western horizon, as he wheeled right round facing Mr. Holmes again. "What! —*what!*" screamed he: "then I ain't to be right treated, accordin' to all internation'l law and usage as a prisoner, which I calculate I admit I *un*fortunately am!"

The first-lieutenant stood, making a faint motion of his hand, as if blind. He had shut his eyes not to see the man; in fact, the sun blazed up beyond.

"Take it away, I say, ship's-corporal!" almost entreated Mr. Holmes, drawing a breath. "The Captain will be on deck directly, don't you know? The Captain might happen to see the *thing!* Get gloves—get tongs; but oblige me by taking it off the quarter-deck, d'ye hear?"

The collar of Malabaster's jacket was already griped by one hard-knuckled fist, while the grim seaman's other hand was feeling for a looser part of Malabaster's breech, in order to lift him clear

away through a lane of men, who scowled hard to keep down other impulses that might have got the better of them.

"Wall, our government'll call it over, that's all," said the American—not without a certain grandeur of confidence. "So will your'n, mind ye; it's contrairy to all European law—it's piracy, look! We're recog*nised* all round, see, Lieutenant! Kim-kim, now, Mr. Hollums; just see if I tell one darned word of the vessel I belonged to—the self-same 'maphrodite as I understand you was so mighty keen about. It's one o' the very squadron that done so much damage to ye lately, out o' Mobile: government brig-schooners is two of 'em —twelve guns, and a long brass-pivot nine-pounder; this'n was the *Commodore*, commanded by no less'n the famous Itefell N. Dodge hisself, of the Navy! That man is about up to most things goin', see; fast-risin' officer, he is, Mr. Hollums. Got notions of his own, *he* has, and works 'em since he was promoted off the merchant service—that's a fact. D'ye just guess, now, how Commodore Dodge ain't been caught yet, nor like to be, unless you smoked the trick?"

The ship's-corporal, in the same ready attitude, had still suspended procedure at the first-lieutenant's involuntary glance; Malabaster had even been allowed, without relaxation of the grasp, to come up closer to Mr. Holmes, whose

inward struggle was apparent. "Well?" said the latter, impatiently.

"Oh, wall," responded the fellow, sinking his voice, "it's scassly deck-work, Lieutenant Hollums —it's sort o' cabin talk, so to speak. They call the brig the *Cameleon*," he almost whispered, with a meaning approach to a wink. "The brig-schooner —that's to say—ay, the 'maphrodite, sir. Still, you understand me, being situated a little deli——"

Mr. Holmes had looked curiously up to the fore-yard-arm; but at a single authoritative nod, the culprit was hoisted speechless away forward— only to be hustled out of view below, where, for many a day, Malabaster seemed lost, as well as forgotten. "By the Lord! sweep the spot!" vehemently burst forth the first-lieutenant — "sweep it! *Is that one of them?*" muttered he, walking aft with Lieutenant Courtenay. "Something seems to say so. I never was in the colonies myself, north of the Bermudas. No, no, Courtenay —rebels or not, our hemp don't grow for such reptiles as that. Poor Robinson, though! I felt sure he was the right stuff, and even *now*—true, true, the thing *must* have come out! 'Tis as well as it is. Yes, put him down at once in the report —'John Jones, A.B., larboard-watch, Mess No. 9, washed overboard when the ship was being laid-to, being one of the men that had been in the after-rigging with tarpaulins.'—Robinson was no

more his name than it is mine, sir; it's only part of the one hanged lie. Don't you see, however, Courtenay, if I hadn't pressed him——"

Mr. Holmes mused the rest of that remark. The second-lieutenant looked up when the morning report was about ready for the Captain's eye. "As to all that about the colonial fellows and their doings?" asked he. "A whole squadron of 'em, it seems, with no less than a commodore. *Dodge*, I think—Commodore Dodge. Strikes me, Mr. Holmes, I've heard the name before, somewhere."

"Excuse me, but I doubt it," said Mr. Holmes. "The entire account, d'ye not perceive, was a fabrication. One's memory is very apt to play tricks on such points," added he, sagaciously, "and so I felt, myself, at first mention of the names and particulars. Cunning enough — *like* the vermin, sir! All I've to say is, Courtenay—and that's some comfort in case of any truth about it—be the names what they might, as regards that hermaphrodite we chased, they're all sufficiently quiet at this moment under the Atlantic. *We* got but the mere tail of the hurricane, but I'll be bound, whoever caught even as much—in a colonial craft of the sort—met with a settler. I'd *rather* not trouble the Captain at all with such rubbish."

All hands were mustering fore-and-aft; the silver "calls" trilled along, the drum rattled, the arms clashed and saluted amidst the hushing

throng, as the Captain passed out on deck; between the groups of officers in uniform, before the stiff-ranged rows of marines, in full view of the huddled masses of men, who swayed under his gaze, with their toes to a line on either side. He raised his hat, and bowed; he took in every proof of a restored efficiency, to complete which the past storm had but left a little more forenoon's work; he saw that all was well, and gave the approving sign of dismissal. There was nothing new in the fate of Jones; there came no further sign of punishment for Jehoshaphat B. Malabaster.

A day or two had passed, when three sail of merchantmen from the south were visible; the same afternoon showed others to the westward—as if the eye of Dick Diamond had been rather prophetic than merely keen. Those first-seen were spoken by that time, and one was soon near enough to send a boat aboard the frigate; while they all gathered toward the convoy-signals of a sloop-of-war on the farther horizon. They were bound from Barbadoes, St. Lucie, and that quarter, for the homeward track; and though not far remote, for some previous days, from the parallel steered by the *Astræa*, had only encountered a common gale when she was reeling before the hurricane. A suspicious stranger had very recently annoyed them by hovering near, though heavy, armed West-India-

men they mostly were,—until the brig-of-war had rejoined their company, and got them more together; after which the intruder had vanished, being a large-sized brig-schooner, or hermaphrodite, under spread of sail. Learning which, Mr. Holmes might have been observed, doubtless, to look confused and awkward. But the frigate was now again steadily pursuing her original course for the Bahama banks, and there were affairs of a wider scope before her—too imperative to invite confessions from even a first-lieutenant.

There were very few letters so near ready in the *Astræa* as to make it worth while troubling the *Lady Downes*—a London ship. However, finding that the *Cygnet* brig-of-war had despatches and mails on board for Plymouth, a bag was hastily made up, for which the boat of the West-Indiaman waited: her bluff young second-mate, or "dickey," modestly cooling his scarlet face with a little spirits below in the master's berth, where Mr. Chuck corrected his longitude by way of return; while a jovial old passenger—a planter returning "home" to settle, eager for the latest news, was being entertained to lunch in the gun-room, bringing some genuine cigars. At the aftermost lee main-deck port, out of Mr. Courtenay's private state-room, the gun-room-steward's boy was quietly making a good thing of it for his principal—bartering extra supplies of ship's rum, bottled and

watered, against plugs of prime tobacco. Thus, almost forced into hurrying off a letter home, which he had meant to make longer at his leisure, Harry Spencer had still time to add a brief post-script. He mentioned the heavy weather they had of late successfully encountered, and that there was now really some talk of business up northward, off the Great Bahamas; he knew not what as yet. He was there brought to a sudden close; to read over his letter was out of the question; he had forgotten even to reconcile any odd impressions about his captain's mental soundness, with the full satisfaction as to his own prospects, or with the professional ability he more than ever extolled in his hero.

And so, soon spreading studding-sails for its wings, rolling before the breezes, dipped beyond the rim of sight, went away with all its inconsistent traits, that first message from the *Astræa* to Beech Grove. Weeks and weeks after, when a new year was in, it might arrive safe—only enough, indeed, to perplex the memory, to distract the heart, perhaps to keep up an image before the fancy, and yet excite vain regrets.

"Dodge!—*Dodge!*" might Mary Spencer well repeat to herself, puzzling over the allusion which Harry seemed to think so plain to her. "Sure, the skipper himself," wrote he, "can scarce have ris'n so very fast! Besides, he was only in the

Cape Cod trade when he turned Privateer; so it must be only some Relation of his. *Commodore* Dodge staggers me, I must own; but you *must* confess an odd Coincidence."

Very probably, as he requested her not to speak of the thing at present, his prudent sister would literally adhere to his desire: but this was no reason why Kate and their mother should not *read* the whole letter.

CHAPTER V.

IF ANYTHING, HIGHLY COMMERCIAL.

In a deep, narrow lane of the dingiest brick, off the thick of Bristol, was Mr. Ffloyd's sugar-bakery or refining-house; near a number of others, which in those days flourished so notably as almost to monopolise the city's name for what was rich and vulgar. A busy scene: sledges groaned through the lane, cranes swung creaking above them; hogsheads were rolled into the yard behind, from an adjoining wharf; packages were delivered out of warehouses in front, into vans and into drays; the steam hissed forth within, the smoke poured up above, as the rough sugar in the hogsheads was changed into the snowy sugar-loaves within the packages; while, throughout the many-floored height of that red building, with its ranges of diminutive windows, there were numerous men and

boys actively employed in a great variety of ways from porterage and cooperage to the niceties of refining; and the workmen employed in raising an additional structure of yet redder brick, within the same premises, were an obvious testimony to the successful condition, the ample means, the overflow of business, which common report at any rate attributed to Matthew Ffloyd, sugar-baker, nephew and son-in-law of old John Broadby deceased. Since he had left the firm of Broadby and Co., indeed, this understanding as to his great prosperity had rather increased than lessened. He had always been reckoned a shrewd man, a man who knew the world, a man who understood exactly what was what, a solid one, a sharp one, a hard file, and so on. There were many persons, smaller manufacturers in the same line, subordinate tradesmen connected with his business, shopkeepers and others with whom he dealt, who looked up to him greatly. There were not a few, even, that had nothing at all to gain from him, who, out of pure deference to his character and standing, considered him a valuable citizen indeed; some of them esteeming him as among the longest-headed, surest, most sensible men of the present time, with a view chiefly to his mental qualities; others looking more to the personal, and entertaining for the wealthy sugar-baker a degree of regard that every day approached nearer to absolute affection. His Methodism, which was

zealous, did not stand in the way, even at a time when that peculiarity was still new, and still hated. A strong desire was growing amongst his friends to have him an alderman, next election: a movement had also begun, since the separation from Broadby and Co., to procure a valuable piece of plate and present it to him at a public dinner in his honour, in testimony of their unabated confidence and increased respect for his many public and private qualities as a citizen of Bristol and as a British merchant. He had, in fact, a reputation for hoarding and niggardliness; there were impressions to the effect that he had lent out money on usury; he spent nothing on his family, or house, or anything visible; he himself had so shabby an old week-day dress, and such an unpowdered scratch wig, while yet waxing heavy in person, with a gross puffed face, and red, inflamed sort of eye—and he walked about with one hand, or both, so constantly in pocket, habitually jingling keys, with so overbearing and rough a manner and sordidly calculating an expression, overseeing, fuming, bargaining, speculating, managing, peering, "pushing,"—that few, who knew Mr. Ffloyd, failed to think very highly of him indeed from the commercial point of view. To see him with an acquaintance or friend, he might have been thought an eccentric philanthropist, humoured because of secret worth: he was head of all things at any place where he was invited; his jokes were enjoyed, however coarse;

he interrupted everybody with his huge voice, and everybody gave way to him; yet the more, it seemed, and that without force or flattery, was the great sugar-baker sought after and clung to, as if for some inward virtue. All agreed, at least, that he was very "warm." He was undoubtedly *good* for a pretty large amount. Sugar was considered rather in the light of being his hobby—a kind of useful amusement for his declining years, which blended the agreeable with the profitable. What a first-rate business man, too! He had done so well for himself, that more than one individual, neither related to him nor even a personal acquaintance of his, was understood to have made a will in his favour.

As Mr. Ffloyd was all for what he called the practical line, and had always made it a great occasion of private invective against Mr. Spencer, that there was so much book-keeping at Broadby and Co.'s, and so many clerks and idle lazy fellows there with special departments of their own—he naturally did very little in that way himself: there were so few books kept in his establishment, as not even to require a book-keeper, a clerk, or a counting-house. He was manager himself, continually hurrying about and overlooking; all the foremen worked, like signal examples to the hands; as for the young man who did ciphering and the accounts, he *stood* at a single desk in a little closet partitioned off with

rough deal from a corner of one of the factory floors; where the men's wages were weekly paid out of a small pigeon-hole with a shelf outside, and where any rough jottings of goods received, orders taken, or sales effected, as well as the accounts to be sent in, were made in haste. Lest Thomson, as he was called, might linger too long, there was no stool; for he was expected to turn his hand to something really practical the moment he was done, and go and help with the next filling-out of sugar, or to see the hogsheads told down or swung in on the wharf. A huge young man, of herculean make, with gigantic bones and a large, lank, simple face, he might have been thought capable of taking up the sugar-baker, for all his weight, and strangling him in his arms—on account of the special abuse, the ill-language, unreasonableness, and tyranny both small and great, poured upon his head by the master; which was imitated by every subordinate, so that the very boys sniffed at the clerk. But Thomson was from the country, and had been from a lad under Mr. Ffloyd, and was always very willing and good-natured; besides that he looked up to Mr. Ffloyd with more immense confidence even than other people, honouring his very worst traits, and believing him the richest man in Britain; while he had an old lame widowed mother from the country dependent on his minute salary, who, if possible, exceeded him in reverence for Mr. Ffloyd,

and constantly inculcated obedience to the latter, among other pious duties, though she had never seen the sugar-baker at all.

Assiduous as usual, therefore, stood Thomson at the desk in his little booth-like wooden compartment off the busy main-floor of the sugar-factory; with moleskin sleeves on—to save his only coat when he should go bodily to work again—which rather tended to stick to the desk and book. He completed a certain sum in compound addition, wrote out the sum in his most elaborate style, leaning sideways away from it; and folded it up into the form of a letter, which he himself was to deliver on his way home that evening, as well as to receive the money and grant a receipt; then he took for some minute or two a general survey of the volume, poring over it with a mingled attention, admiration, and perplexity, which were by no means unnatural; so singularly did the record combine the characters of journal, order-book, cash-book, and ledger, with an alternate simplicity and complexity of entry, by which the common methods were left far behind. For a little, the stalwart clerk lifted his head in a bird-like way to meditate, and scratched it with the reversed pen, as his thoughts seemed to pass through the dusty, cobwebbed window, that gave to the outside air its own dull complexion. Even the blowing afternoon of early spring, with the roofs of the neighbouring sheds in it, and the fluttering vanes

of adjacent vessels, looked thus dull, tattered, and streaky; the richly-fretted old stone tower of St. Nicholas's, not far off above the tiled brick of the next lane, was blurred and lump-like: only, its chimes struck clearly through the noise of the city, the clash and resounding of the quays, the groan and welter and creak of the docks; now and then came out with a pleasant vividness of reality the crash and clang of some falling load; the cry of men rose cheerily out; the smoke and the sunshine and the fitful sky shone broad forth, all over the afternoon, till that very window responded and grew almost transparent; then it all blended down again together into one grim, tumultuous, sombre medley, with the rain falling from a muddy sky, and the roofs dripping. Thomson had never taken very kindly to clerkship, though his schooling had turned out so well; steady as he was, he had used to have a fancy to be a soldier, which somehow had been roused up again by some stray piece of a newspaper he had seen of late, about the war; especially now that he felt himself grow to man's estate, and Mr. Ffloyd did not seem to think of his own accord about raising his salary; which, to tell the truth, was small. It had begun to look smaller, through the representations of an old wooden-legged sergeant who lived up the same alley as widow Thomson, and who smoked and knew the world, having also a well-looking daughter. And although Joseph

(which was the clerk's name at home) totally repudiated sundry suggestions of the sergeant's against Mr. Ffloyd's whole character on this account,—even with considerable indignation; yet strange thoughts did intrude upon his simple mind at a moderate computation of the profits of the business, with those hoards of money besides, which were understood to be his master's.

Suddenly, however, after having been absent all forenoon, Mr. Ffloyd came shouting and bustling in with an important customer of his, a wholesale grocer from Bath; who was a Methodist too, but sleek and smooth, without noise, awfully smileless, gliding, turning his hands constantly within each other, yet not rubbing them. The sugar-baker stumped hastily to his sample-drawers, which were variously numbered, and drew them out successively; while the grocer on tiptoe, cautiously, carefully, revolving his hands silently within each other, peeped in. "Number four," loudly says Mr. Ffloyd, "a first-rate quality, sir—the very article to suit, I tell ye—it's ninety-one and six the hundredweight, though—won't say a halfpenny less, if you was the Chancellor of the Exchequer!"

"A fine suggar—a *re*markable fine suggar indeed," the grocer returns, taking a piece between fingers which seemed too thick, too clammy, too devoid of nails, to feel anything. "But roughish, Mr. Ffloyd, sir—decided roughish, and a 'arf too dear

for them 'ard times. And 'ow is *h*all the blessed fam'ly, sir, at 'ome—well in 'ealth, I 'ope, Mr. Ffloyd?"

"Ah! Humph! Of course. I believe so. No fear—no fear!" coarsely replies the sugar-baker. "Come—business is business, I say, in business hours."

"That's well, though—that's well!" meditatively pursues the customer. "Aye. M—hm. It's a thing to give thanks and praises for. Here's number three, now—a good solid *h*article—no show, but usefle, sir—usefle—decided usefle. And w'at figger could you put in number three for, Mr. Ffloyd, say two ton odd?"

"Eighty-nine pound net, to *you*," Mr. Ffloyd said, jingling in his pocket, and then emphatically shutting the drawer No. 3 with his other hand. "Not a groat less, to save your life. In quantities only. *Under* a ton, at ninety-one and two."

"At six months?" inquired the Bath grocer, in an insinuating tone, glutinously circulating his hands and looking down, with a furtive up-squint of one eye.

"Cash," Mr. Ffloyd answered with a blustering look. "Cash terms, sir—with three-and-a-half per cent. off to a good customer, of course. D'ye think it's an object to Matthew Ffloyd? If so, you're mistaken—Matthew Ffloyd's not your man in that sense, I can tell ye!"

"Dear me, Mr. Ffloyd, sir—no—not at all," the grocer hastens to say, "certainly not. I *did* think o' steppin' across to Rowbotham's t'other side the river—but *h*every man's *h*excused, I 'ope, them times, doin' the best 'e can for 'imself? Well, we'll double the quantity, and say likewise a ton-and-a-'arf o' number four besides—come, there's a 'an'some *h*offer, Mr. Ffloyd! At six months, though. Times is diffic'lt—excessive diffic'lt, sir, to men like me, as 'as their small retailers to deal with. *You* knows nothink off it, sir—nothink!"

"Why, it's not likely!" vociferated the sugar-baker, with his characteristic horse-laugh at some secret fund of mirth to him alone. "Ho! ho! ho! it's not likely—eh? Don't like books, I can tell ye—nor clerks! Look at that idle scoundrel there! Out of my way, you awkward lump, or I'll kick ye—hand here the pen—book the order, d'ye hear! I say, Mr. Stokes, as it's *you*, then, I don't mind taking your six months' bill?—Here, sirrah, you Thomson, run out for a bill-stamp."

"No—none o' that for me, Mr. Ffloyd, sir," interrupted the grocer, putting up his hand with a cautious air; "no bills. I don't understand 'em. Never did. If we can't do business, good and well—the Lord reigns. Let us be glad. And I trust Mr. Quickberry, your Local, is well, sir—both in a temporal sense and *h*otherwise? A real servant and a useful worker is John Quickberry, Mr.

Ffloyd—and reg'lar took up out of the mire unto grace! Them chief sinners makes the powerflest instruments in preachin' the word! And the new chapel, I'm told, sir, answers glorious, since *you* have done so much for it. It's them things makes me like puttin' business into the hands of godly men like yourself, Mr. Ffloyd—and Rowbotham's folks are nought but worldly clingers, they say—but no doubt it were *h*otherwise appinted!" And Mr. Stokes sighed piously, raising his eyes, smoothing his oily wig, taking up his quaker-like uncocked hat to go.

"Well, well," Mr. Ffloyd agreed snappishly. "It's terms I wouldn't give to another man, on no account—but takin' the six ton, of course, why, I don't mind."

"Two ton every six weeks?" persisted the grocer, "put down reg'lar and sound—and—and—delivered—*free*, eh? Let's see—yes?"

"Nothing of the kind!" the sugar-baker said fiercely. "See you—*farther* first, sir!"

"No?" inquires the grocer speculatively, in a mild tone. "Oh, well — no offence, I 'ope, Mr. Ffloyd, sir—merely a quest'n! Heavy times these, I do assure you—*h*owin' to this war. Most soft goods is lookin' dreadful up—spices is perfect ruing—*i*nd buyers by no means lively. Much sin an' thoughtlessness in the land, I'm afraid, sir, *h*and our rulers is not by any means to say godly, I fear—far from it."

They were going out together, when Thomson deferentially followed his master to inform him of a person who, during his absence, had wished to see him. "There was a fine gentleman in a coach and pair, with a black footman and a real valley, and a coachman in a——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" growled the sugar-baker; "what have I got to do with all that? And so ye haven't anything *else* to stare at, eh? Don't know any fine gentlemen in carriages—tell 'em I'm not in, d'ye hear!"

"He's a Count, the valley said, sir!" was the big clerk's earnest reply, "and he'll call again."

"*Count!* I don't know any counts or bishops, no nor lords either!" shouts the sugar-baker, with a great face swelling redder in his limp white neck-cloth. "What's your quality-folks and their vallies to *me*, sirrah! Look a little sharper to business here, I advise ye!"

"Oh, but one of Broadby and Co.'s clerks was a-calling too, Mr. Ffloyd, sir," perseveres the huge lad, still following; with anxiety for his charge depicted on his large, honest, simple features, once rustic-red, but now sallow through confinement.

His master turns on him with a roar that would have made most lads jump in their shoes. "*That's* about their last bill to me—eh? It's due to-morrow! I'll not lift it—I'll not renew it—he may break if he likes! He may smash—Spencer may

go like a pipe-shank, d'ye hear! I don't care—I'm not going to cover him, see!—There's your book-style, Mr. Stokes! There's your credit-system—your fine spec'latin' enterprisin' large-scale notions! No. Safe and sure's my motto. Take a line and work it, sir, and know what you've got for your money. I'm a practical man. No books. No bankings. No bills. It's the third bill for a round three thousand at four months' date, because he couldn't pay out my share o' Broadby and Co. in cash—and here he can't *meet* it! What's three thousand to me, you know—but am I goin' to bolster up this here rotten system? No. See him—*farther* first! I'll *rank*, sir—I'll smash him, and *rank on the estate!*"

"No, it's not about renewing any bills," said the large-boned Thomson, steadily. "Mister Webb says of course that's all right there—they'll meet it to the hour, punctually. We're owing Broadby and Co. a contra for sugar and mats, sir—it comes to a deal, and it's pretty near due. They're a-wanting the favour of a settlement this week—but they'll take a bill, Mister Webb says, sir."

"*No*, you hound!" yells Mr. Ffloyd into his very ear. "Tell 'em I won't!—And look—see that ye square up pretty fast, by I come back. I'll be back at night again, after the number-three filling's ready to pour: Mind ye don't leave, sirrah, though the hands be gone home—or you'll remember it as

long as ye live! I'll trounce ye!" He shook his fist at him, and shambled heavily off. Odd to have beheld, certainly, was the colossal mould of the apprentice-clerk returning with a dejected patience, as if the threat had been a plausible one, to the desk and his figuring again.

The sugar-baker had not far to go home for the evening-meal of that period, at which he bluntly indicated no unwillingness that the wholesale customer should partake. The old half-timbered house that had been John Broadby's, dark and dingy—but with an effect which later tastes would have admired—overhung a corner of the nearest street, having had its underset basement turned into a watchmaker's shop, bright with windows and jewellery; the parlour was dusky and low-ceiled, panelled round with deal that had been long ago painted a light drab, like a room full of doors, unadorned, close-flavoured, looking out along the bustling street past the base of a near church-spire, that shot up from sight, with half its clock provokingly concealed by a chimney. Shop-signs were clearly visible, and the opposite windows of a hatter and a tailor, also of a spectacle-maker whose suspended sample might have fitted some aged giant;—the other way, it saw right down the narrow lane to a deep niche full of rigged masts of vessels. From it there now escaped, by an opposite door, one of Mr. Ffloyd's daughters, whose hair seemed oddly twisted

up; another appeared in the passage, who retreated, was shrilly heard to order a maid-servant, and then entered, very plain in looks, and pinched and prim and flat-shaped; Mrs. Ffloyd hurried in with an anxious face, carrying the teapot, and beginning hastily to deprecate something till she saw Mr. Stokes. The latter was full of excuses also, and of shop-like politeness as to a well-prized customer; taking her hand into both his, and as it were turning it round and round within them, while he almost purred over it, blending devout allusions with inquiries as to health. Soon the first daughter returned in more fitting attire—a fat girl, indeed, of still youthful age, with shining complexion of that sandy hue which accompanies red hair; though the hair was done in loose curls parted to each side, that gave an innocent effect, and the cat-like eyes with whitish eyelashes were oddly enticing and quick for one so young in appearance, who ventured, too, to say so little. She wore a strange figured, spotted chintz, such as would in after-days have been applied only for curtains or sofa-covers—which, however, being gaudy, and made in a school-girl kind of style, set her off well against her sombrely-clothed sister, with her tight sleeves and stinted neck-frill. Now, the recent widowhood of the wholesale Bath grocer was well known in "the connexion," (so ran Wesleyan phraseology); but he belonged to the

severer sect of Whitfield, and it was most suitable that the grave conversation of the elder daughter, Rachel, should engross him; yet none the less possible for Martha to sit and simper, and, in a childish way which seemed not noticed in the family, to titter and flutter all over when Mr. Stokes addressed her, or offered a chair; while she wriggled in her dress, and her shoes creaked, and so did the internal arrangements about her waist. As for the mother, the famous old John Broadby's daughter, she had sore eyes, and looked very bleached and dowdy altogether, with a depressed, melancholy, devout expression; never seeming to presume to say anything beyond the commonest matters, to have any opinion of her own, to mind being interrupted by any one whomsoever, in what few syllables she uttered: her cheek was much swollen from toothache — as she in a mumbling way had to explain to Mr. Stokes,—besides which, she apparently had a cold in the head, with a slight huskiness of voice. And there was a great hulking youth, who came stealing in to the supper-table after the long "blessing" had been asked by Mr. Stokes, while the cups were being handed; he looked very much afraid, stood hanging his head and stammering, and said the school had been kept late,—while his father roared at him; then he floundered down into a seat, sat far from the table, silently reached over everything for his wants, trod

on his sister's foot, sulked, frowned at his mother, and seemed by hints to gain obedience from her. They took cheese with tea in those days at Mr. Ffloyd's; there was a boiled Spanish onion also—a luxury both pungent and large—with some raw young English ones, of which Mr. Stokes partook with much obvious relish, handing them round to all. He could not in civility except Miss Martha, who ate one with a childish giggle, looking at Mr. Stokes the while, till she cast down her eyes—but ate still.

At the class-meeting of that evening, in the adjacent chapel, Mr. Stokes made up his mind to be present along with them; for he desired to learn how the good work flourished under Mr. Quickberry, and at home he was used to take a part in the leading, with mutual revelation of experiences from the inner man. To Mrs. Ffloyd, on the other hand, long denied any other solace or nourishment, never drawn by any other influence that was better than the merest bargaining and convenience, it was the very breath of life to go there. She was quiet about it, and only mumbled something in reference to the teapot, or asked for the kettle; but truly, when her husband had first joined the meeting and encouraged the chapel-building so much, she had perhaps found something among the rude zeal of the Wesleyans as they multiplied, which might make up to her in the end for many things. This it might be, which

had furnished her secret support, under a power too coarse to see it; leaving the heart that had once been no doubt hopeful like other women's, not altogether too dreary and too dull for endurance. She did not drink, nor take laudanum; she could not play cards, nor give parties, nor circulate much scandal, nor write any books; she was a Methodist instead, under Mr. Quickberry, with his predecessors and successors on the migratory system. At that day, those half-hidden people compared experiences, they took counsel together, they sang hymns, had sudden motions of sympathy, prayed, enjoyed glimpses, contended against the world, encouraged each other, strove with the evil within, had a phraseology of their own, sought to hold out not so much an example as a reproof and token, and cared not greatly what came of the rest of men. Perhaps she had sometimes listened to the white-haired Wesley himself, benignly stirring up,—or to his clearer, calmer, yet more poetic brother Charles; she had possibly once heard Whitfield, in that dull, cold, trifling age, call with a terrible tautology and directness to repentance, and make men tremble at what they knew before, by the sincerity of one who believed as he spoke, full of awe, and zeal, and love of heaven. Even by her, might spiritual realities, not expressible by human words, have been felt; she might be conscious of a growing clearness

within, and be grateful; and might perhaps at times entertain a vague sense of celestial things, mixed no doubt with a great deal of foolishness. Whereas to the sugar-baker it had possibly been but a sudden caprice of opposition to his father-in-law, a means of business, or the effect of a troubled conscience long ago, after he had come home from abroad; still Ffloyd could not take it away from *her*, nor could the world. As for the old parish church—into which her own father's marble tablet looked, John Broadby's, with the fine epitaph and the allegory—it would have been now not merely too old and cold by far, too damp and gloomy and elaborately stately: it would have been the house of Baal, the vestibule to the broad road leading to destruction. Toothache though she had, she hastened to put on cloak and pattens, taking the cubbish young Matthew with her: the wholesale grocer followed with the young women. Young Matthew, indeed, seized some excuse to make off at the corner of the alley leading up to the chapel,—which in reddest brick and most formal slate, with windows as dissimilar as possible to those of churches, stood barn-like in a neighbouring inclosure.

From the window of Mr. Ffloyd's bedroom at the back, where the sun of the spring evening shot, the chapel could be seen; with the local preacher's little house just opposite, and the court filled up between with the local preacher's garden, amidst carpenters' wood-yards and back-greens,

with lumber-sheds, and all sorts of miscellaneous nooks and refuse places. The bedroom-window looked at it westward over the town; the bedroom itself, through the door that stood ajar, untrim and shabby though it was, might have been felt to fill gradually with the sunlight like a pool from the tide; while the dull parlour was falling into shade, with the sugar-baker leaning back in his arm-chair, half dozing beside his glass of punch upon the table.

There were few newspapers then, and those that there were came seldom, except to the reading-room of the Exchange or those of coffee-houses. A great thing indeed to Mr. Ffloyd was the news; the news were his soul's necessity, his only exception from the rule of money-making business, his nearest approach to something of a human weakness. To hear what had happened in the world last, and to hear it soon—to be able to tell it first—whether it were parliamentary vote or election return, fire, shipwreck, bankruptcy, murder, robbery, defeat of the ministry, death of a foreign sovereign, fall of the funds, rumoured mishap to the British forces, looking up or dulness of markets,—this was a restless craving of his, every day growing stronger; and was yet attributed solely to keenness in business. Possibly, there had been no news that afternoon, or none expected. His tavern circle or club, however easy to join on ordinary occasions by some business pretext, happened to be

this time in common decency out of the question—every member had confidentially hinted to him a pleasant reason why, that night, he had as well *not* drop in. He had a tired, heated, heavy look in his chair, with his eyes every now and then shutting; at times again opening to observe nothing with a vacant, unmeaning, lacklustre effect, almost plaintive—especially when he yawned and looked round the dull room, settling himself back again. To Thomson the clerk—to Mrs. Ffloyd—to the cowed, sulky boy, Matthew—it would probably have been odd to catch him thus as he leant, without any noise, bluster, or bullying. But he suddenly sat up, broad awake, as if seized by one of those quick thoughts which will choose such occasions to rush in—he stared before him, and sat thinking with his clenched hands upon his two knees; till all at once, glancing round him cautiously, he rose and crossed into his bedroom on tiptoe, as if some one were there. It was but an old bureau, however, of some rich foreign wood, brass-bound at the corners and silver-mounted, in a sort of Spanish-like fashion; with writing-materials inside, and sundry odd things scattered about there or in drawers which he tried, that were somewhat incongruous with sugar-baking, as with Methodism too—things of value, such as a gorgeous ring or two, a great gold chain, the heavy setting in gold and precious stones of a miniature

that had been taken out—some articles of a sterner nature, moreover, such as the splendid pair of inlaid pistols that lay among a confusion of papers, and the little greenish phial labelled with a singular hieroglyphic (an italic *o* above a capital X, to the initiated eye in fact sepulchral). Mr. Ffloyd found at last what he wanted, and wrote; first rapidly enough, then carefully, copying from something in a letter—a process which he repeated in the same order with another document, and then, with his head stooped forward on his hands into the bureau, sat as if meditating; a strange matter for one like him.

How strange, too, behind him—to the curtainless window, with Mrs. Ffloyd's old gown hanging sun-steeped from a hook in the door—rose the back view into the city after that rainy day. Blue shone the slates of house-roofs through the clear air, the red ridges of tile looked fresh over the close lanes, where the smoke from brick chimneys was ceasing, or rose upright in the quietness; the rain had utterly ceased, the wind fallen still; with the more tumultuous rush and turbulent throb, came the noise of the town as it lessened, with a confused, fitful, rattling clamour, wilder to hear than any battle—so did the sound of hurrying wheels mingle with it, or strike out separate, or die away, with sudden voices, and fragmentary snatches of unaccountable music, unintelligible cries, coach-horns,

clock-chimes. At hand, went the roar and tramp of opposite crowds through the deep perspective of one street, that plunged into the city's heart to rise steep beyond the smoke again—with roof and projected window, lamp-iron, shop-sign, and pavement, against the terraced, tree-crowned hill. The red sugar-bakery was still steaming and puffing near; well down, across the timber-yard creek with its building-slips and sloops, were Broadby and Co.'s old dark warehouses, where cranes hung out and wharf-sheds ran along by the ships, and there came yet a last *Yo-heave-o* or two of the tugging sailors ere they went; many a sail was loosed to dry, making a white light up beside the dingy houses, where at back-windows with sinks and soil-pipes, there stooped many a kitchen-wench, housemaids looked far out, night-capped nursery folks took a parting peep of day beneath the blinds. The full tide swam up with a gleam and settled; the fresh vessels floated to their places; the tall-rigged ship that had just reached abreast of Redcliffe Dock, grew stationary there against the budding row of trees, folded all its tawny canvas, made trim its yards, and, with a gay blue vane-flag and a vivid parti-coloured ensign, stood distinct in every line before the opening of a street across the river, where the people's figures moved to and fro round the quays.

Such moist clearness as was there! Such an aërial spaciousness all over Redcliffe side to the

distant windmill on the hill, with its clump of bare elms! All the black, funnel-shaped bottle-works, the winking foundry-fires, the bristling brown chimney-stacks and their smoke, gained an unwonted force (which they in their own fashion repaid) from some white clouds that leant over above the haze they made, with an immensity of azure sky overhead, and the evening star in it. Almost right under that, shot up the rich tower of St. Mary Redcliffe's—where young lost Chatterton had so lately been—carved and fringed like a jewel, and tipped with but half a spire, and glistening softly from among squalid houses.

Thomson, the clerk, was hastening back at that moment from supper at home, and came whistling along, looking round him at everything, seeing all, enjoying the air and the stir, though he was to spend so many extra hours that night in the sugar-house; he absolutely stopped on the bridge—happily unseen from the highest back of the cross-street—eyeing the sky and water, the ships and the windows in silence; quite forgetting himself, thinking of foreign lands, thinking of the sergeant's daughter in the alley, till he heard St. Mary's strike, with the cathedral chime farther off, and took to his heels almost to run on, certain of a regular blowing-up from his master, in fact, conscience-stricken himself. In the tavern, again, a very respectable one not far off, called the Moor's

Head, where the sugar-baker was sometimes known to vouchsafe his presence,—they were puffing their usual pipes over the customary rum-and-water, talking of him with more than the ordinary admiration, deference, reverence, or warmth; indeed, the club was full, and partook of business with regard to the intended presentation of plate, which of itself accounted for the vacancy of his chair. In the meeting-house close at hand, the exemplary presence of his family was being felt precious, though with a slight qualification from his own absence—a too frequent feature at week-night class-meetings: the wholesale grocer took a friendly part in the proceedings, and referred with a circuitous unction to their fellow-servant and brother detained apart by temporal cares; he joined also with a working-shoemaker there, in the work of mutual confession, encouragement, and zeal; he supplicated, and near him was Martha, not unheard when the class ejaculated "Amen, glory, glory! True, indeed! Yea, verily!" or, "Grant it, grant it!" Then they chaunted a hymn, now in female voices, now in male, now all together; its repeated burden being thus: "But still, my soul, I long to know, whether I love the Lord or no!" The meeting-house windows being open at the top, whether because the season advanced, or to testify the better against a careless world,—while the back bedroom-window of old Broadby's house had been

left open at bottom,—the singing might soon have reached Mr. Ffloyd's ear amidst the diminished stir of Bristol,—a strain incongruous enough to the outer thoughts of most men, but devout, solemn, sweet, bringing to mind whatever religion the heart hides, if the ear could take aright that plaintive rise and fall, that blending of joyous harmony.

It was nothing of that kind, however, which roused up the sugar-baker with a start, from drowsy reveries that might soon have been lulled by old hymns. It was the sound of a knock at his street-door, of the maid-servant's voice in speech with some one, and her entrance to tell that a gentleman would be obliged if he might see him for a little. The gentleman had sent in his card. It was "Mr. de St. Amand"—the *Count*—the same conspicuous personage who had not only been heard of so much in Bristol, but been once seen at the first with Mr. Spencer in the Froom-lane counting-house,—whom, in fact, however curious that hanging-on of his about the old firm might appear, the ex-partner had not since cared to see. Mr. Ffloyd turned the card over, scowled at it, growled at it; but locked his bureau and came back into the dusky parlour, shutting the bedroom-door behind him; he put his two thumbs in his waistcoat under the arms, stood upon the rug before the fire, stuck out his front, set back his head like an English merchant, and grumbled an assent.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE PRIVACY OF MR. FFLOYD WAS BROKEN IN UPON.

MR. ETHEREGE, ushered to the door of the parlour, hat in hand, came courteously in, and bowed.

"Well, sir—oh! ahem! I—you're the Cou—— your lordship was calling at the works this afternoon, if I'm not mistaken, my lord?" says the sugar-baker, too suddenly falling from his elevation into a flutter at recognising the titled foreign gentleman he had once or twice seen before.

"Ah! I did myself that pleasure," Mr. Etherege replied, with an easy grace which was still more embarrassing; while he seemed to deprecate ceremony, quietly taking a chair, extending his hand as if to beseech his host to be at home. "But you attribute too high a position to me, my good sir.

The passion for titles is one of the silliest in the world. I am not a lord, I assure you, Mr. Ffloyd. Pray let no such idea deprive me of this opportunity to mix with your celebrated middle classes—with the genuine English manners, the sense, the solidity, of which I have heard so often! Let us be at ease together. What excellent weather—what an evening!" The visitor smiled and bowed again as he spoke; but he had sat down with his back to the light of the sky, so as to present a rather obscure figure to Mr. Ffloyd, who at the same time perhaps felt that himself and everything in the room were being closely scrutinised; for he stuttered in replying, and first sat down awkwardly, then got up again to call out at the door for candles. "Without having had the honour of an introduction," the visitor continued, with the same studied politeness, "I called for you, Mr. Ffloyd, on business."

The sugar-baker's hot and disturbed visage could not exactly be said to brighten, nor his usual overbearing confidence to return; indeed, Mr. Etherege's luminous black eye seemed to exercise a subduing power over his heavy and inflamed ones, when they were not rather fascinated; but he put on a brisker air, looked more civil, and rubbed his hands a little. "No need of any introductions in business," said he. "None whatever. Always ready for business, sir, from a hogshead to a ton o'

number seven; and I don't mind who it is. If they're equally *good*, the Duke o' Bedford and the travelling gent is quite the same to me!"

"Ah!" tranquilly responded Mr. Etherege. "True. 'Tis what I expected from description—of the independence, the self-reliance, the immovable brusquerie of the country—of the solid, the substantial middle class. Commerce equalises you together! I am myself—by descent, perhaps—somewhat commercial in turn of mind. I trust business flourishes at present, sir? What a scene, that factory of yours! What bustle—what activity—what order! Such extensive additions in process, too! Such numbers of workmen! It pleased me, idle traveller though I am, to watch it from the carriage as I waited there to-day. Finding it difficult to obtain an interview there, I took the liberty of, perhaps, intruding on your hours of repose? Your energy, Mr. Ffloyd—your enterprise and success amidst a period so arduous—they are remarkable. One admires them!"

"Oh, ho! pretty well—pretty well, I own," said the sugar-baker, blushing, fidgeting, and wincing from the keen glance, as if he had been a boy. "Anything I can do for—a—a—any wholesale transaction, sir? Markets rather up this afternoon. You wouldn't believe what us business men 'll make by them quick turns, sir; but we may lose as much, or more, the next day, ye see. Why,

this very mornin', I made no less than my cool couple o' thousands, sir, at a stroke—a single purchase, you understand! Sugar was up half an hour after! Ha! ha! ha! Lucky, eh, sir?"

The Count raised his eyebrows. "Indeed!" he said. "Is it possible? I ought to take an interest in sugar, since I have a small estate in St. Kitt's, where they grow it. One might gain, it seems, were it an object to one—by only reflecting for a moment. And my agent there, poor fellow, must no doubt profit but slightly by these changes. You yourself have been, I think, Mr. Ffloyd, in the West Indies?"

Mr. Ffloyd might have been noticed to start in his seat a little, and almost to gape at Mr. Etherege with a sudden attention and surprise. "A—a—*sir!*" he stammered, "what business is that of—a well—yes—so I was. Oh, of course—you're right, Mister. Then you think of consigning a quantity—*direct*, perhaps? I'm your man, sir. Matthew Ffloyd's always open to any amount of business, look. What will you ship for, per hogshead, say, on the quay at Kingston?"

"I rather think of *buying*," was the quick rejoinder. "You were in Barbadoes some years, I believe, my good Mr. Ffloyd, and in St. Lucia? Till the year 1750, nearly thirty years ago, when you left the islands for England?"

At each question thus put, with a perfect suavity

of manner, though with a keenly fixed eye, Mr. Ffloyd stared, blinked, appeared to attempt a refusal or denial, an evasion or a bluster, and yet gave a husky assent, till it became rather a galvanic sort of nod.

"You observe, I see," pursued his elegant visitor, smiling, "that I have interested myself in these travels of yours, my good sir. After all, what *is* one, without having seen the world! And this must indeed qualify you for the successes, the skilful dealings, to which you alluded! What a region, Mr. Ffloyd, is *that*—how different from this cold, dull country, with its propriety, its decency, which is after all so hypocritical! Were I less a traveller, a cosmopolite, a citizen of the world, my friend,—I could almost claim you as acclimated to the islands. Even the crimes there, the vices, have a degree of what is admirable by comparison! They strike terror by their boldness; their impetuosity arrests the imagination, so as to be difficult to forget. You must remember such an occurrence near Jamaica, my dear sir, which took place shortly before your departure?"

"I—I—sir—a—a—I do not see—what this has to do with—sugar," the manufacturer faltered, shifting helplessly in his chair from the gentleman's eye, and wiping his heated forehead with a yellow pocket-handkerchief.

"Pardon me," Mr. Etherege blandly continued.

"You will perceive the connexion in another instant. I have lately received letters about the affair, for it has accidentally revived. A Portuguese, named Coguel——"

Here the whole solid bulk of the sugar-baker was perceptibly shaking, in spite of a desperate self-constraint; while his large face got livid, and quivered like a jelly.

"A Portuguese, named Coguel—who escaped"—repeated Mr. Etherege, "has been discovered to be the chief perpetrator of a murder. Speaking privately, my good Mr. Ffloyd," he said, in a familiar tone, and turning full to the master of the house, with an indescribably significant look, "there can be no doubt that this Coguel was really English."

The effect produced on Mr. Ffloyd was thoroughly new, and manifestly strong. He looked hurriedly round the room, glanced at the door, seemed about to spring up, glaring like a tiger at his visitor, and measuring him from head to foot. Ffloyd had been a strong square-built man, and his features must once have had a great deal of a coarse handsomeness, set off by black eyes and a high colour. He appeared for a moment to recover something of all these characteristics, with the sudden convulsive energy that rose in him: but Mr. Etherege remained cool, his keen perception showed itself in the ready attitude as fully as in the keen glance; he was in the young prime of his life, elastic,

active, with an eye quick as the light; wearing a slight dress-sword, as gentlemen still did when they walked of an evening; and a slight air of satisfaction, with something of sarcastic amusement, curled his dark upper-lip. Mr. Ffloyd visibly collapsed, and fell together before him.

"You recollect it!" said Mr. Etherege, passing to a sardonic irony. "Ah! I was too young, naturally, to contract with it any such emotions. Pooh! why agitate ourselves, dear sir, about what has become by this time a mere abstraction? I assure you it need trouble you little, if the practical part, as we English say, be arranged. Pooh! *vengeance*, at this date, against so base and sordid an object as Broadby's agent must now be—punished by detection, by fear, by exposure suspended over him amidst his success, in his declining years, before the eyes of his devout friends! Bah! it is too absurd, my good sir! Even Coguel, the traitor, the spy, the assassin—call him the corsair and pirate, if you choose—miserable, poor, hiding, no doubt, in dependence on the charity of his accomplice—what a ridiculous object for the law itself, after more than a quarter of a century! Let us for the present altogether dismiss this possibility, Mr. Ffloyd. It is not even necessary now, or desirable, to see this wretch in person. The question now rather concerns the interests of those who suffered from a crime in which he seems

to have been but the tool. The instigator was more atrocious by far—you *understand* me, sir? *You knew Coguel?*"

"A—I—I—have heard—of the man," stammered Ffloyd, turning away with an unresisting abjectness that amounted to the fullest admission.

"One word more on that point, Mr. Ffloyd," said Etherege, in a changing tone. "It is *true* that Mr. Spencer knew nothing of it? He was not, in fact, there till subsequently; he was not even connected, till some time afterwards, with the establishment from which I discovered but of late that *you* had retired. Mr. Spencer appeared utterly unsuspicious of the whole—it is so, I presume? His innocence is genuine, then?"

The peremptory question extracted a hoarse assent, accompanied by something like a groan.

"Briefly now to the point," resumed Mr. Etherege, whose eye had sparkled almost joyously at the last assurance. "It is on the part of my young West-Indian friend that I act—the only son of the victims—himself detained from tracing out the rest of this villany on the spot. Himself elevated above it now—too far distant, too much absorbed, and perhaps too happy by fortune and position—after devoting years in the search, he has placed the result in my hands. I need not say I refer to the young D'Etterega, son of that Don

Victor, who, with his crew, was murdered by Coguel's plot—and of that widowed sufferer whom it drove to end her sorrows in a convent. Did he now stand here instead of his friend, I could not engage for his self-control—even for the object of finding this mongrel Portuguese, this Coguel. *I* do not relish the task, Mr. Ffloyd, be assured—*Coguel still lives*, does he?"

Ffloyd with difficulty brought himself to reply: "Coguel? oh—yes—Count—yes," muttered he. "That's to say, I think so—I have heard as much—yes, yes, my lord, he is living. Of course, I wasn't going to shut my ears any more than others, about his escaping—I couldn't hinder him getting over to this country—if he's known to be skulking about London, under different names and that, troubling people if they ever happened to know him, it's no fault of mine."

"Certainly not," was the composed reply. "Nevertheless, Coguel must be found. There is a price at which alone such atrocities can be left unavenged—the criminals must pay that price, if the means are yet in their power. If *not*——" there was at this word a significant fierceness in Etherege's scrutiny, not visible to the averted eyes of the sugar-baker, but all the more pointed for his ear.——"*If not*, D'Etterega himself, I need not remark, is a Spaniard. Incensed, roused, necessarily summoned to England, he would no

sooner be present, than it might be useless for me to talk of law—of atonement—of his own interest. I, on the contrary, am cool, calm, calculating—in short, Mr. Ffloyd, as partly English by blood, by adoption still more so, I keep within the law of the land and its customs, when I say that I had fain prevent the arrival of young Etterega. True —true—I see—you would say there might be difficulties in the way of justice so long deferred—Coguel can still be bribed in secret, the agent of Broadby cannot be convicted, and English juries might even call Don Victor d'Etterega de la Castra himself—as was done by the hypocritical merchants of Kingston—a legal victim, a secret corsair, a Spanish pirate!"

The large rough head of Ffloyd, sunk down upon his chest, had risen by degrees, turning a stealthy regard towards his questioner: a gleam of sullen defiance seemed about to follow it, as he abruptly answered. "Ay, aye by G——! so they might, Count—let him come over himself, say I. Why don't the young fellow bring a fair charge, open and above-board like a man if he be one——there's some reason, look! It wasn't much that was done after all, say the worst of't, so far as the firm was concerned, against—against the Don; and when a man's repented, and done his best to get peace aloft, mind ye, it's hard—hanged *hard!* Mightn't some sort of an explanation be come upon with the

young Don, d'ye think? if he was only *here?* Or some amends, so to speak?" He faced Etherege stubbornly, adding, "all the safer for him, see!—all the worse t'other way. Curse the thing, I'm not going to be bullied this long-tongs fashion by *him!* Is't money he wants? Well, I've none to spare; and as to Coguel, he's old, his life ain't worth hunting up, what's left of it. Curse Coguel, I say —I'm not his keeper, nor I don't know where he skulks to. Ye may find him, for *me!* If Coguel peaches on himself, the more fool he—it can't go farther, about Bristol."

Etherege's contemptuous face grew stern again. "You forget, Mr. Ffloyd," said he relentlessly, "were the effect harmless to all that scene of manufacturing activity and of solid commerce, which I witnessed this afternoon—you forget that Morel and Son in Barbadoes could personally identify the English agent in question, that some of his movements can still be retraced, that a fragment of his letter to Coguel exists, and that the dumb mulatto boy, Adolphe, sent here by my young friend, might lend his mature testimony on this matter, as well as on Coguel's. You mistake me, however," pursued he, seeing that Ffloyd's head was quickly dropped again to his hands; "money, on the part of my friend or his family, is still less to the point than revenge—if money has aught to do with it, if money is even requisite for

any trouble, for any search, any unavoidable expense or advisable bribe—nay, to sustain the wretched existence of the very murderer in his retreat—then money will doubtless be furnished."

Even then there was a furtive glitter from the eye of Ffloyd, though he did not raise it. "Oh—— well," said he, huskily, "if Coguel could be put hands on, money does a deal with his sort—people might take it that one's *made* o' money, actually hoarding it, by what they'd seem to be always expectin'! Here am I myself, now, Count, no doubt with a big concern on my hands, to look at —well—but you can't believe how hard the times are—for that matter, ye see, though the business *was* blown up to-morrow, it's no such great affair to part with." His accent bore a sulky emphasis, and he again cunningly looked out sideways at his resolute questioner.

"I warn you," inexorably returned the latter, "that there are considerations too grave—interests too indescribably delicate—to admit of this paltering. I write *to-night* to my friend in Barbadoes; circumstances are so altered, as to render it desirable that he should trace out some missing links of this villany; in short, that some lost documents be recovered — some proofs afforded — which, it is all but certain, were aimed at, when the fiendish lieutenant of Don Victor planned his ruin. In a word, Mr. Floyd, let us decide!" He took

out a small jewelled watch, and laid it in his open hand upon the table. He had watched the altered expression of the sugar-baker's looks; which, for a little, perplexed his own—so intensely wakened up to inward troubles and terrors did they seem, without need for external pressure. "Let him only be found!" continued Mr. Etherege. "You, sir, are a man of business, of experience; you doubtless come in contact with numbers of persons in a class which—which is not usually met with in society. You *will* oblige me? Yes; but immediately, recollect—though I, myself, when it is in my power, am *prompt;* it is D'Etterega who is passionate—perhaps rashly so. *When* may I count upon this? On the other hand," he quickly added, meeting a strangely anxious glance in return, "the present interview is known to no one else; were my personal pledge to silence not enough, I can see that on some grounds even D'Etterega should be advised—nay, he *ought not* to require more. Indeed, my own honour gaged, there is no man who shall! Speak, however; when can this Coguel be found?" Etherege rose with an elaborate slowness befitting the tone he took, though no less drawn from the strong effort of his self-control. "Take a day—two days—I will give more," he said, sternly turning to go; "but the time, when named, must be observed. The mulatto servant, Adolphe, who is with me at my inn, will *see* Coguel."

"Yes, yes, for any sake, Count," ejaculated Ffloyd, somewhat recovering himself, "give time—give him time; at least a week, I'd say; he lives in such low lanes—such holes—such curst holes—another town altogether, mind ye, your lordsh—— your Excellency, I'd say! Ay, it's in London, as I said—somewhere about Rosemary-lane, in Wapping, or else Whitechapel. I'll find him, though—cost what it will, I'll find him!"

"A week. Yes," was the deliberate answer, "take a week; after that, come to me at the Cannynges Arms, *here*."

"Of course—*here;* that's understood—quite understood, my lord!" The same careworn and technical look coming fully out as the sugar-baker spoke, eager, scared, hurried, yet inwardly weighing some desperate chance. "But then as to money—of course I might advance it to the fellow and his pals, if things weren't so precious tight just now; there'd certainly be expenses besides, the more anxious they see ye about it. If it's a fair question now, Count," he asked, rising also, and leaning nervously over, with both hands on the table, "what might these said matters be, that are wanted? 'T might clear our way, you see. It seems the fellow's not needed, *himself;* there's no wish to push him hard?—in fact, he's not worth it. He's a poor object by this time, is old Coguel; few 'd be able to prove him, look ye, and he might brass it all out. Any-

how, what's it about *worth* to him, suppose he risks his neck, gives in, and does his endeavour, as you may say, to right matters?"

The sudden gaze of the sugar-baker fell before the flashing eye of scorn bent down upon him; notwithstanding which there was a settling audacity about the visage of the former, that brought a disdainful reply. "I have already stated that money will be no consideration in my friend's eyes. Let a sum be named; I will engage his consent; meanwhile, it may be drawn on my Bristol bankers; I will sign the draft whenever the proofs of eventual satisfaction are in my hands."

"Would it be too much, d'ye think, my lord," began Ffloyd, tremulously, "just to set out with—say a bill merely, and I'd easy enough discount it——. It's not from grudging my own cash, if I had it to spare; no, nor the least benefit to *me*—God knows! I'm called a miser—ho! ho!—a miserly hunks, an' a worldly Demas out o' their 'Pilgrim's Progress,' by gosh! To show ye it's all a lie, Count, I'll share the risk myself, and say a bill at four months' date—neither *ask* a cheque, look ye, nor 'd take it if you *offered!* Still, considerin' all, it couldn't be too much to set out with, if we said five—no, three hundred a week hence, if Coguel satisfies us?" He looked up very earnestly; there was no surprise whatever in the imperturbable, though recoiling attitude he saw before him. "I'll

undertake he does it by that time, only just say what's *wanted.*"

"You are somewhat precipitate, I fear, Mr. Ffloyd," was the cool rejoinder. "It is indeed plainly superfluous to go over all the details of an occurrence, as to part of which I am perhaps the less informed of the two. It may, however, be necessary to state, first, that this wretched Coguel had had the insolence secretly to admire the beauty of Mademoiselle Amandine D'Hevrecourt — or more probably her attributes as an heiress, the only daughter of a rich planter—before her elopement with Captain Don Victor, the father of my young friend; on which occasion, being then lieutenant of the *guarda-costa*, he even assisted. It was through some subsequent presumption on his side, that a quarrel led to his being cashiered and dismissed—to his afterwards living on land, as an enemy, yet a pretended friend—in short, a spy, false to both sides."

Mr. Ffloyd had let himself down on his seat again. "A spy, ah!" muttered he through his set teeth. "To both sides—ay—*false? Hang him!* What matters, though—*now*, Count? I could have fancied as much; just let's know the worst of him at once."

"He knew where the legal journals of the vessel of war were kept, having himself had their charge at the period of the marriage on board;

that most of the witnesses of the ceremony were at hand when he returned there as a traitor; that the chaplain—an aged priest—had only been removed to the adjoining islet on account of a dangerous illness, while the vessel was being careened. It is undoubted that the horrible plot, however instigated by others, took its shape from a cherished hatred of his own—that he had a yet more fiendish design in view. Perhaps, even English enmity bore *some* resemblance, at all events, to what is human!"

"He had it all in him, and more," hissed Ffloyd, in reply. "He had good reason, and knew, no doubt, 'twas touch-and-go with him else—a cool enough hand he *was*, too! That's to say, Count, he looks it, ye know—I mean, looks as if he might ha' been."

"Coguel had time," pursued Etherege, keenly eyeing the other's averted posture; "he had opportunity—before his hand kindled the train to the magazine—for abstracting the ship's journal, and other papers, now of some importance. True, the dumb mulatto boy, Adolphe, whom this demon had once mutilated wantonly, survived by accident. There was also a young Spanish seaman at that moment with the invalids and females on the rock —the only remaining witness of the marriage, except Coguel himself; but though believed to have reached Cuba with the others, his name has been lost. The dying priest, too, left a brief

statement, whose imperfections must be supplied. The admitted escape of Coguel from the explosion of *El Serpiente* with her crew and——" Etherege stopped short at the sudden movement with which the sugar-baker dropped his forehead against the table. For an instant he looked at the writhing ungainliness of the bulky figure; he listened to one hard-drawn breath,—then, agile and fierce as some savage forest-creature, at a single bound was griping the throat of Ffloyd. "Ha! *you* in very deed, then?" his deep voice throbbed into the man's ear,—but as he held him, he checked himself at the changed and frightful countenance that was turned out, manifestly as heedless of the grasp as of what else might come.

Ffloyd threw out a convulsive hand, aimlessly, but irresistible, and put his authoritative young interrogator away. "What do you want? What have *you* to do to come betwixt a man's conscience and his—his *hell?*" groaned he, moving his great rough head to and fro against the table, and lifting it again by fits. "Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" With that he sprang up and faced the steady determination of Etherege. "D'ye know what hell *is*, Monsieur Count? You seem to come from it, anyhow. Stay, it's nothing but a bedroom in here,—keep the door to all eternity if ye like, for what *I* care!"

There was water beside the dressing-glass, which

he began to pour out with a shaking hand; though his eye fell on the deadly green phial beside the richly-inlaid pistols, and he would perhaps have darted that way. But under the gently-wafting window-blind came in a sound from the open tops of the chapel-windows adjacent, suddenly made distincter through a door by which some must have been leaving earlier than the rest—the loud burst of exultant voices sending out a well-known tune, whose words were known, across the quietness of the twilight street—

"Now rest, my long divided heart,
Fix'd on this blissful centre rest!
With ashes who would grudge to part,
When call'd on angels' bread to feast?
Happy day! happy day!
That washed our sins in blood away!
That taught us how to watch and pray!
And live rejoicing every day!
Happy day! happy day!
That wash'd our sins, our fears, away!"

Wild as if met and baited back from refuge, Mr. Ffloyd came driven out again to Etherege's demands. "Come, Count!" cried he, madly, "no more of this—what signifies *names* about it all? One name or t'other, as well end it and take me —I could ha' put a bullet through you this moment, or a good sound dose of a sleeping-draught *here!* But what's the use—we've to face it out sometime, and I always knew it'd come at last. I wonder if it's worse than racking one's brain for ever

about that blasted United Counties' Bank, and insurance loans, and fortnights'-wages, and Spencer's infernal bills, by God! whether he'll meet 'em or not when due! I'll sit down, look, till you've called a constable—well, then, Sarah there can run out, as I'll tell her, if ye'll pull that bell-handle behind ye. I suppose she may go as far as the hackney-coach stand?—chapel 'll just be comin' out about the time. But as I am a living man, sir, I haven't really got as much in the house this moment as 'd pay the full fare to Castle-street!"

Etherege had paused in the very act thus suggested to him; he looked narrowly and wonderingly at the utter, the final recklessness of a desperation too real to be questioned. "You were *already*, then, on the brink of ruin!" he exclaimed, coming forward pale with anger; he bit his lip and considered, not even heeded by Ffloyd. "In reality, as it now proves — like your fanaticism, like your respectability, like the other pretences which were rashly attributed from elsewhere, and from which others might have suffered innocently—even your hoarding, your sordid and penurious habits, your very manufacture was a hypocrisy, a mask, a deceit and lie!"

Ffloyd dully heard him; he gave a sullen jerk round at the latter charge, and said, "I defy any man to turn out a better quality of article than Matthew Ffloyd did, late Watt and Brown—'twas keepin' up the name of the concern that hampered

us. Confound it, sir, I took a pride in the finest quality!—I was regularly *drawn into* No. 7, and what with that and the times, and sunk capital, here it is! No, *there* you're wrong, Count—my credit's whole at this moment! I can't help think-thinking how it 'll horrify every man of 'em—but credit won't always keep payin' high fortnights'-wages to five dozen gapin' factory hands and a long-jawed clerk, let alone house-expen——"

"How *much* would save you?" asked Etherege, with an abrupt effort over his unconcealed disgust. "Understand me, *man!*" he added, catching the sudden upward gleam of inquiry that was thrown at him: "What sum of money, I say, as alike sparing you from the gallows of a murderer—or if you prefer it, of a *pirate*—and allowing time for the efforts which must be stipulated on your part? Name it—at once name it—what sum?"

"What I named before would only have staved things off for a little," was the dogged answer. "A thousand pounds—aye, if I had the certainty of it—*half* in a week's time, the rest to *count upon*—of course *that* would set all right till we floated again. What's the use talking, though—I don't so much as know what's wanted of me, or whether I could manage it—who knows, even though I could, if it 'd serve their turn? Besides, promises won't answer—no, nor waitin' for posts and mails! Say a loan—your own bill, Count—nothing but a *loan*, and what can be done I'll do."

"To you—or to Coguel," said Mr. Etherege, "I should scarcely think of lending. To my friend Etienne d'Etterega, on the contrary—should it be evident that his demands are in the main reasonably fulfilled—I *will*. To-night, to-morrow, the day after that—indeed, the question can be deferred no later *now*, Mr. Ffloyd. The demands are simply these—that said legal marriage-register from the Journal of *El Serpiente*, and the certificate of the chaplain, if these still exist. At the worst, we must obtain the requisite information to trace out one witness, a young Spanish seaman at Havannah—and also the 'Portuguese' Coguel himself, he must be at hand. It seems unnecessary for *you* to travel in search of this, as yet—if so, the mulatto Adolphe will inevitably follow." In the subsequent pause, Ffloyd's slow, hard breathing was audible; so was the very ticking of the rude house-clock in the passage, the slighter pulsing of Etherege's watch, which he took this time from his breast as if it beat too sharply there—like another heart, golden and bejewelled. "I do not know, observe," said he, with a seeming superiority to this suspense, "that *all* these are indispensable. And if *enough* be but recovered, I do not say that young D'Etterega's own compassion—his very scorn—may not do more than *I* have promised."

"He's well off—he's rich, perhaps, Count—this young Don—this young Spanish planter?" asked

Ffloyd, lifting his head a moment. "Still, them's rather hard words, for a man doing him a good turn. As for old Coguel, of course, *he*'s the last that ought to grudge doing it, if it 'll make any amends?"

"Do not imagine that D'Etterega's wealth depends on such vile services," was the sharp answer. "It might indeed be, were his marriage to render it desirable, that my friend might thus more than double his own fortune—by more clearly proving his title to that of a deceased relative, which must otherwise fall into the clutches of foreign priests! To the point, however—with *this*, neither I nor you are concerned—what am I to answer him to-night? The post-hour passes, Mr. Ffloyd."

"I'm thinking over it," said he, gloomily. "Give a man time to think, Count. About a runaway Spaniard at Havannah, why, grant his name's recollected, how's he to be made sure of among droves of 'em, changin' their names as they do—drowning or rotting, for all that's said? Then, you say he's to keep at hand, himself,—well, so be it, he's most likely the only man to go and prove the t'other fellow; what's the use where you've the papers and books? They'd surely be enough for any court on 'arth, take 'em with a priest's word."

"His dying *oath*, it seems, sir," was the emphatic correction; "given before a public notary at Havannah,—yet too mixed or too incomplete to stand alone."

"As to that, I've seen him blinking and fingering over papers enough," ran on Ffloyd. "Tryin' to make 'em worth money, no doubt,—but who was to know it? Then, for log-books, they're a sort o' lumber where he lives—hang it, *yes!* the more I think, the liker it looks! Let's only have time, as I said—time just to hear back by Town post, that's to say, and I'll do my best, Count! *More*, look ye, the devil himself can't—the post can't go to London and back in three days! No, take it how ye like, by the week I'll stick. If I don't bring you them papers safe by that time, why, what's the odds on *your* side—you can take me, and much it 'll matter! The week after, why, 'twould be all smash at any rate behind me—where have I to run? I tell ye, Count, if you was just to whisper outside there just now, as ye go, that old Mat Ffloyd daren't seek to borrow as much as would pay his stage-coach fare, to run off—still less his post-chaise or his gig—he'd be in jail long before morning!"

Returning voices and steps were at the opening outer door, household sounds and scents of supper were astir, so that Etherege had already made motions to go. "Wretched man that you are," he said, almost with a shudder, "what miserable evasion is this! Do you *know*—or do you *not*, that Coguel had the doubly-fiendish design in question?"

"As I've a living soul to be—aye, to be damned!"

came the vehement declaration, "*no*—no, Count, at any-rate clear him of *that*, see! I'll never believe but there's differences in damnation, tho' I've heard it preached over my head for years to the contrary. He *couldn't* have, of course—not knowing the ship's log-book might ever be wanted. But there's often other reasons, blind ones, may be—in the hurry, bless you, a man 'll sometimes clap hands to no end on the nearest thing, aye, and keep it ever after like a fool! If ever there was a man of the sort, it was Coguel in these days. I've seen him, I'll own,—I won't deny I knew him well enough—too d——d well, Count! Only stand to your terms, in fact,—nothing but a *loan*, mind ye, either way—and I'll try him on the right tack, never fear. By the week's end, I say, yes I'll *try him*, that's all. The day after to-morrow's a Sunday, now I think of it —well, by the Saturday night after, at latest, I'll be up at the inn, the Cannynges Arms, yes—I know it. Good night, then, my lord, good night." So little ground was there in all this to suggest madness, that, at the end, Mr. Ffloyd's composure tended to restore that of Etherege: when the latter coldly bent his head to him, he took the bell-rope, that Sarah might be at hand to show out the visitor; he stood firmly on the hearth-rug and saw him out with an awkward bow; while the unctuous tones of Mr. Stokes, the wholesale grocer, blended with those of the younger daughter in the passage, as she kept

his hat behind her and helped him off with his walking-spencer and comforter, and softly urged him to stay to supper.

"I trust, Mr. Ffloyd," had been the concluding words, "that we understand each other—that I do not, I mean, mistake your purpose. D'Etterega's own slave, Adolphe, observe, will be *near*—and though a changed appearance may hitherto have deceived him, yet his senses are only less quick than his acts. From *him*, a suspicion of your falsehood might be still more fatal than the law of England—and *his* tongue, at all events, cannot betray him. As to a single conjecture on his part of what seems to me the actual truth—*I*, at least, shall not hazard your life for the present, by a word that could excite *this!*"

As the young man turned from the street corner, with impatient step, and with an eye that glittered or darkened to his thoughts, some scattered groups passed him; decent trading-folks and workpeople, young women, lads, children,—sober in dress and look, a few with faces glowing out strange joy, some instead only displaying the little books which all carried. They were the last of the chapel-people dispersing; neither they nor Etherege heeding each other much. Finally out of the chapel lane came two slower figures—a middle-aged woman better dressed than others, a kind of lady of the congregation, with but poor remains

of a common-place comeliness—the other a younger man in sombre clothes and limp white cravat, with round smooth-shaven visage and close-shorn powderless head; from which, under his flat-brimmed hat, there looked an eye almost as dark as Etherege's own, but too unutterably serious to do more than take him in as he passed. *She* was looking uneasily towards the lighted windows, while her companion's earnestness was bent upon some graver theme: "But I mustn't loiter, Mr. Quickberry," said she; "I see Mr. Ffloyd's come home very soon to-night." The Wesleyan pastor stopped short, he grasped her hand, and let her go in haste, then abruptly turned to the wood-yard alley, that let-in upon the brick-walled court with stunted poplars, right opposite those round-topped casements —closely facing which, as from a stingy cemetery, he abode-out his local term of years.

To John Quickberry, local preacher to Bread Alley meeting, even his people were hindered from becoming too important or too much endeared, by the fact that he must ere long change his district, and shift to some distant dwelling on the same plan, opposite to a precisely similar tabernacle: when his gaze was free, it found the self-same interest in every figure that could not but contain the one great attraction—a soul to be saved or lost. His solemn, unsmiling gaze for a moment was exchanged with the inscrutable glance of Etherege,

who had paused only to notice the brief homeward passage of Mrs. Ffloyd.

Erect, intent, brilliantly handsome, with an air of rank that could neither be muffled nor shaded from view, Etherege had stood to observe her, and nothing more; whether this care was followed by pity or curiosity, by misgiving or satisfaction or resolute indifference, no eye could have inferred as he resumed his way. It was but the equally inscrutable expression of the Methodist minister's face, meeting him earnestly from the alley corner, that slightly curled the fortunate young traveller's lip, when he strode on with no heed whatever to John Quickberry. To Quickberry, on the other hand, he was utterly unknown, unguessed-about; for, seen from the last distant turning, the preacher still stood, indeed—book and key in hand, fixed in the attitude to disappear—but he was eccentrically staring up, up, as if to see whether the sky too would sneer at his anxieties. From its vast western azure a dewy planet had come out, white and lambent over the city's floating vapours—Vesper, the planet of Love; opposite, the deep spring night raised Charles's Wain toward the steadfast Pole-star, the Milky Way glowed arching upward, the studs of the armour of Orion's giant knee were glistening faint though awful from his immemorial southern station; while everywhere, if an eye but looked, the firmament shot softly forth its other

lights. Was this poor rude zealot an astronomer? Could he suspect, as the tropics might have hinted to him, that sublimest irony of the Universe?—which almost seemed to sprinkle towards his superstitious glance, through hypocrisies of the very English air, its grand geometry of reason in enigmatic handfuls—like seed for some minute ephemeral bird. Did this sectary even penetrate beneath the grossest deceits of his own ridiculous little chapel—or might Ffloyd possibly be ever fool enough, when his vile end came, to disclose them to *such* an ear!

Exquisite planet of Love—Venus! that had been sweet to passion from the earliest ages; by which Leander, while he swam the Hellespont, might have guided himself towards Hero's lighted balcony. Full to the north-west it set, over the dull lump of St. Mary Redcliffe's tower, toward the darkened trees of high Beech Grove, where windows twinkled. It was too late to follow thither, for that night: but ere turning down into Brandon-street, Etherege stood and looked steadily that way. There was evidently an intense sense of the present in his nature; a capability of enjoyment that well befitted his impulsive character, his liberal yet refined splendour of habits, and his personal beauty. He had already shown, that so far as his own wishes went he would grudge nothing—not merely to the object of his passion—but to any of

those who were naturally dear to her. The old baronet, Sir Ralph Herbert, was dead, leaving his title to Herbert Court of course; his whole estates also, as had been long known, were now to pass with it, if the Captain, his nephew by the elder branch, proved true to the old creed, and legally fulfilled the prescribed terms. And Etherege's own fortune was enough: his cousin's title he was above envying. Still, if Bristol rumour were correct, if Somersetshire gossip were not baseless, and English opinion as well as British naval rules were not a pretence, Sir Richard's baronetcy appeared certain to be a poor one: the Captain of the *Astræa*, as presumedly a member of the Church by law established, could not accept those stipulations if he would.

The wealth of Arabian tales could not have been too much to heap—their luxury not too sumptuous to spread—where the coy feet of Catherine Spencer as a bride would pass: coy as they might be, heedless of such temptations as these, and yet more indifferent to the thought of coercion, their very self-will bade fair to quicken them soon to Etherege's hopes. She was very young; he had restrained himself wonderfully, he had not betrayed to her the lavish generosity that others detected: there was a truly English rapture which had begun to light his half-averted glance, at recent signs of a free, a willing, a conscious permission of these

gradual addresses. This it might have been, that made him draw in his breath with a sharp shiver of too great delight, when the reverie was broken, and he hurried downward.

"Cold night, your honour," said some bold hearty voice in passing; and Etherege had mechanically assented, though the honest frankness drew forth his most cordial tone.

"*Cold!*" echoed he, with a smile. "But there is native worth in England—even her climate, at this season, appears more congenial to me.—After all, such villany must be rare—let the wretch but satisfy me, and——yes, death were indeed preferable to that dread on his part, to that unaccountable, that base terror, which justice ought only to *prolong*. — Death — *death!* — why talk of death, which alone can separate me from Her at last! The ecstasy—the transport—the glow which burns me, may be the more insane—but it is all the more rapturous! Horace, Horace! did you know this when you said it—

——vina liques, spatio brevi
Spem longam reseces!—carpe diem,
Quam minimum credula posteri!"

CHAPTER VII.

SHOWING HOW THE "ASTRÆA" FRIGATE, FROM ZEAL IN PUBLIC SERVICE, BECAME MIXED-UP WITH CONCERNS OF BROADBY AND CO.

THE *Astræa's* last special orders from the Jamaica station were duly carried out, by making the best of her way, after the weather resumed its usual tenor, to an appointed rendezvous off the north end of the Bahamas. She there joined company with a small squadron fresh from Plymouth, under the command of Captain R—— F——; a senior officer whose full titles had better, for obvious reasons, be forgotten, except by those who have studied the Navy Lists of the period. The squadron, though despatched for an important purpose, was singularly small and inadequate in force; originally consisting of a twenty-eight-gun frigate, a corvette, and a couple of brig-sloops, the two

former indeed new, coppered, and built to run as well as to work, but still marked examples of the Admiralty's disdain for heavy metal in single-decked ships (anything, in fact, above twelve-pounders), and of its strange reliance on the spirit as well as the character of the British bull-dog who manned the guns. The *Astræa*, owing to circumstances already narrated, was a little behind-hand; her reception was quite as unpleasant as if the utter failure of Captain F——, or his total destruction by a superior force, had been deliberately planned by her commander: notwithstanding which, there was at first an affectation among the officers in general, kept up to the last by their acting-commodore, of setting no great store by an accession of strength—so exceptional according to rule, though so undoubted in substance, as a forty-four-gun frigate still seemed in those days. Even the popular applause of many-headed Jack, from the other ships, was not murmured without qualifying remarks, or detracting speeches from a non-electoral minority. For she was not much to speak of in light winds, after all: her best point seemed to be with the wind rather before the beam, or perhaps close-hauled—the short poop spoilt her, and besides, the mizen-topmast (in reality a new spar) was too light for the other sticks; in short, the said critics unfortunately did not belong to the *Astræa*. The worst that could

fairly be said against her was, that no other frigate then afloat had much chance against her; that old Indiamen, such as the rebels had, were not likely to try it afloat—and on the other hand, as to *her* going in-shore after them, her draught of water did not suit: so that by herself she had no great prospects of glory.

The truth was, the *Astræa* was not even an experiment of the Admiralty, but an accident of the First Naval Lord, Admiral Sir Edward Hawke; who had obstinately got her built upon the scientific lines of a fine old Spanish frigate, taken under his flag last war, and knocked to pieces on a reef during the peace. The dockyard people had had their own way in over-masting her; Lord Beaufoy and his father, the Earl of Deepmere, had had *theirs* as to the captain who put her in commission; with regard to her armament, her size and heavy scantling almost prescribed the amount of this; at the same time that each party got a finger in there, helped by the patriotic liberality of a manufacturing Scotch firm, the Carron Company, who—through Sir Charles Douglas, a quick-witted friend of Herbert's and their own—had offered a pair of new thirty-sixes for trial on so conspicuous a chance. She was thus a heavy ship for her rating, even as a forty-four; massy, but so long and well-moulded as not to show it till another frigate was near;—the chief point being

that, as a frigate's, her sole unbroken battery was, of course, on a single covered deck, the main-deck. Here she carried long eighteens, sixteen of a side, with six thirty-two-pound carronades in the gun-room, instead of the two proposed thirty-sixes. Now, the naval reader need not be told that in 1779 there were, indeed, already plenty of two-decked forty-fours; they all, however, rated in British line-of-battle, where numerous actions of the period show their names on *that side* (such was the *Serapis*, that saved the Baltic merchant fleet from Paul Jones's squadron, fighting it afterwards with the help of one small consort, and this so well, that shortly after she struck, the boasting *Bonhomme Richard* sank). In the whole then-existing British navy there was no frigate so large as a *forty-four*, except the *Astræa* herself. She thus stood in a nondescript position hitherto, liable for the duties of a cruizer or of a line-of-battle ship indiscriminately, without the advantages of either class. Thus, on the one hand, the seniority of Captain F—— enabled him meanwhile to lord it over her from the quarter-deck of a mere twenty-eight-gun frigate; on the other, should occasion rise for her taking a place in line under an admiral, she was exposed to honours of a somewhat equivocal nature. It matters little, indeed, what were the individual results at hand in her case, compared with the innumerable kindred of eccentricities at

head-quarters, thus soon to be indicated, though indicated only.

Captain F—— had been despatched to intercept a threatened descent on the loyal coasts of South Florida; of which, on information supposed to be genuine, timely warnings had been received. The curious facts were these: The volatile young Marquis de Lafayette had just got back to France, managing to run the strict blockade of the rebel harbours, with urgent appeal for fresh aid; he had cheered all Paris with assurances, *à la Rousseau*, that the noble savages and faithful negroes of the South had but to see him return strengthened, ere they rose; with hints also, *à la Voltaire*, that the infatuated Loyalists of the same quarter should be at once sharply repressed. It was then, too, that Paris rang with the glorious feat of the heroic Scotch emigrant, Captain John Paul (formerly of the native merchant service), who, after being superseded and neglected in the rebel marine, had still clung congenially to that good cause. Captain Paul having obtained a twenty-six-gun ship (the *Ranger*), had carefully equipped her, had thoughtfully reduced her battery to eighteen, and zealously manned her with a picked crew of like-minded men ("he would spend hours with a single seaman on a pier, whom he might wish to gain over," says his American biographer). With which vessel, arriving in Europe, he boldly went in upon the

eighteen-gun ship-sloop *Drake*, employed in recruiting up one of the friths of the country where his mother's cottage stood, and (after Captain Burdon and his only lieutenant had been killed) obtained the victory over "an equal force." Nobly setting on shore the prisoners, except those who hailed him for their chief, he had returned to Brest to be the hero of Paris. His soul was of the grandest stamp: so much so, that he then styled himself the Chevalier John P. Jones; and M. Sartines, Minister of Marine, had once written to him as the Honourable the Commodore of the American Navy in Europe; and he had nearly set the shipping of Whitehaven on fire, even very nearly entrapped the Earl of Selkirk—to whom his father had been gardener—as a hostage against incendiarism on the other side of the Atlantic; after which he had written an elegant letter to the Countess. Moreover, he had entertained ladies of France on board his vessel, tastefully adding the terrific rehearsal of his naval combat—which, at their agitated entreaties, he cut short. A stronger squadron was therefore prepared for his command; and M. de Lafayette would fain have re-embarked under his skilful guidance, though he himself desired rather to take Leith to ransom, to crush Bristol and the west, or to revolutionise Ireland. Now, between these extremes an arduous post was held by the great Franklin, "the sage, the venerable

co-plenipotentiary of the New World;" he, as author of "Poor Richard's Almanack," well saw the absurdity of either hero; Lafayette and Jones were friends of whom it was more suitable to get rid. The persevering economic instinct of this old man for his dull ends was, indeed, worthy of an enmity so unaccountable, so undying, so unscrupulously designed as his had been from the outset, toward whatever was English; compared with him, his Suffolk friend, Thomas Paine, appears a patriot, poet, and philosopher, — his other friend, George Washington, a brilliant, disinterested, gradual, and unwilling foe to British empire. In suggesting—as who can doubt *he* did—that the King of France should depute the Duc de Longueville to ask his exiled guest, Rear-Admiral Sir George Rodney, to take the command of the French fleet to the West Indies, Dr. Benjamin Franklin probably had no idea of moral evil or base dishonour; those ideas were simply non-existent to him,—as all veneration must have been to a Deist far below Priestley's type, who has set on record his vulgar *correction* of "The Lord's Prayer," with an air of having done something useful; who moreover left King Solomon obsolete behind the almanac of New England pedlars, and whose chief fame rests on having drawn down the thunder by the string of a paper kite. Failing Rodney (on whom the blushing French duke then forced the loan that paid his

chief creditors at home, and that took him back there at the right time for his willing friends), old Benjamin was not going to draw down the thunder through John P. Jones, nor by M. de Lafayette either, *for the present.* Nevertheless, he was too cunning and unscrupulous a plotter not to *seem as if he would;* his private letters, even to English Whigs, testifying much more than that. He had written one now, which was intercepted, and was meant to be so,—betraying fictitious plans of new insurrection from the side of Florida, up the Gulf among the Flat-heads and Choctaws; of which tribes he doubtless knew no more than Lord North did.

Hence it was, however, that the hasty British squadron had gone off to meet and catch the braggadocio chevalier, named as American commodore; who was known to have just obtained the *Poor Richard* and six other vessels from French ports. The Admiralty went too far in their contempt, since Jones was about as much desperado as braggart, though mad with the intensest vanity that ever stepped quarter-deck; he was a good seaman, as most Englishmen or Scotchmen are who have worked their way to that platform; above all, he believed the strong new belief of his class at that era, gathering to him a thousand more, who began to believe it too,—none of them the worse for it yet, more thanks to the stimulus of fighting

with halters round their necks. All things considered, the Plymouth squadron was wonderfully prompt; it was even strong,—allowing for the fact that Spain had begun to follow French suit, only in a more open way, and the Dutch held out most significant hints, so as to produce a good deal of hurry about the dockyards; Lord Howe's fleet being out at New York, Rear-Admiral Byron's on the West-India seas against Count d'Estaing. The court-martial upon Admirals Keppel and Palliser had but recently taken place, after that "most unhappy affair" in the European waters,—when, owing to the Toryism of the one, the Whiggery of the other, "or to a defective system of signals," their joint force had disgracefully omitted to inflict condign punishment on French perfidy, as represented by Count d'Orvilliers and his line-of-battle. Strange time! It was strange, even, that instead of the mock-romantic Chevalier having proudly sailed to deliver his adopted land, he was now being hampered by the unsympathising Capitaine Landais under his command, so as to lose time and prey in the North Sea, to reap mock-celebrity, to finish with the Frenchman's rapier-thrust, and a sneer from M. de Sartines as to sending him home "dans une bonne voiture" (in an easy coach); then—thankless Russian service against the Turks, at the end a shabby grave in obscure Paris ground, as some billiard-

marker might. Strange pseudo-hero of the false time, who ought to have had a better destiny, such as the glorious younger peasant of his country was then finding. Odd, too, perhaps, that the *Astræa* should have been by a mere chance available to the aid of Captain F—— against him, so that a further chance might once for all have brought Herbert and Jones into active conflict; but it was oddest of all that the Admiralty should have hit upon the first-named captain as leader of the struggle!

Captain F—— had been previously notorious as a martinet first-lieutenant on that very coast. The mere fact of his local knowledge was trivial compared with this; it mattered little to the point that he had even belonged to one or other of two active frigates, the *Milford* or the *Solebay*,—regarding both of which Captain Paul Jones had shown so much more discretion than boldness in his original American command, that his own naval superiors had consequently superseded him, keeping in mind previous failures on his part. Now that renegadism was in the ascendant, however, marked by an ominous audacity, and by a success which, though brief at the time, was in another war to enforce its most painful lesson—the obstinate unconsciousness of high official dignitaries, long elevated above their own professional experience itself, was nowhere more glaring than in those weak half-measures and senseless compromises they offered against a danger

so obvious. The captain in question was one of a class of meritorious officers always existing, but previously too much neglected, and now become as troublesome as it was numerous; men of neither family interest nor "family" views of any kind, some of them having risen from the forecastle, with professional ability no less undeniable on the whole than their rough manners, uneducated minds, and ungentlemanly spirit. As a general thing, they affected politics, supported his Majesty's Opposition, and had been fast rising; the affair of Keppel and Palliser, the mutiny of the *Bounty*, the illustrious case of Captain Cook, show a sudden prominence on their part which by no means justifies its direction as against "Jones,"—who, in strict analysis, was their counterpart, with such force to back him as the Admiralty had not dreamt of yet.

Captain F—— had already made his new twenty-eight-gun frigate, the *T—rt—r*, more than deserve her name. She was one of those "floating pandemoniums" which British seamen had only of late begun to characterise by a slightly stronger epithet; a title hitherto postponed, in part because they had had but few previous delicacies to compare by, still more since it was chiefly now-a-days that contrasts arose—making their actual case all the worse. The smaller ships of the squadron, indeed, could not be above imitating the *T—rt—r* on occasion; yet in close company with them, after the *Astræa* joined, there was always floating what seemed com-

parative elysium in naval shape. To her it was, in fact, a trying position; by old experience of the *Spitfire*, years before, Herbert himself knew what the tyranny was, even when by his own presence as first-lieutenant he had tried to soften it; till Lord Beaufoy's wilfulness in the *Diana* saved him from worse chance, by domineering his captain into an exchange of "firsts."

The "good men," by chance among the crews of the squadron, deserted at all hazards whenever boats went ashore; the worse waited their better time; the worst were certain enough to stay, sneaking through it all, often rising by this luck—to posts where the time of trial would find them. Out of every merchantman spoken with, that bore British colours—out of every prize-vessel—even out of some neutrals—more were pressed; there was no want of men. Scarce a morning passed on which the signal for punishment did not fly on board one or other ship; the *T—rt—r* had at length to summon a drum-head court-martial, by virtue of powers vested in the acting-commodore, to try an able seaman, captain of the foretop, for striking down a warrant-officer under strong provocation; the sentence of the court being, by a majority, that the prisoner was guilty without extenuation, and according to the articles of war must die. The same afternoon the signal flew for execution, requiring boats to attend from each ship; but very strong symptoms of mutiny had appeared on board, even

other vessels appearing to share the disposition; in which circumstances, the breeze being light, the squadron scattered at the time, and the *Astræa* nearest, she was hastily signalled to make sail and pass abeam as soon as possible, with main-deck broadside loaded and run out, and men at quarters. Old Captain F—— was, indeed, a resolute man; though the old Roman Emperor Tiberius could hardly have been more autocratic, imperious, and cruel. Once a foretop-man himself, before he was boatswain, and rose to be sailing-master—he had got his commission through the Opposition party, for whom his brother, a rich baker, son of a London costermonger, voted and harangued. The forty-four-gun frigate could have shattered his ship to splinters, with him in it as well as his men; he stood upon the starboard quarter, cocked-hat in hand, furious, red in the face, waving authoritatively to Captain Herbert; his first-lieutenant had the speaking-trumpet, but was white as death, the very marines on the quarter-deck looking oddly round: and as the fate of the squadron hung upon the question, it was altogther so hard a case, that if it had gone further some strange issue might have come. Truth to tell, there were some at the *Astræa's* own guns who set their teeth to it with a look which said, for the mere chance of levelling at the quarter of the *T—rt—r*, they would have had small objections to hear the word passed down.

But a sullen change ran along the clustered and

glowing visages on the bulwarks of the *T—rt—r*; the men saw the expression of Herbert's attitude and face, and turned and stood down in order, till all was blank again above the long white hammock-cloths. There was a glitter of fixed bayonets, a stir, a backward rush of the waisters and sweepers with a rope, as a spinning figure of a man shot up to the jewel-block at the fore-yardarm, and hung there twisting for a minute, till all was still—and William Bailey's case came thus to an end. One long groan from more than three hundred men at hand was heard; in the distance, the sharp calls piping away down, the sail-trimmers bracing the canvas full, while the *T—rt—r* stood on her way. The drum beat recall in the *Astræa*, the fifes played it up; the watch was piped on deck, and the squadron went on with the remainder of its work along the coast. Some of it was hardly less unpleasant to brave men, than that last-told; there were sometimes only watering-parties to be guarded, lest they should run into the bush,—at other times men to be tracked up through it, when they were not looked for in colonists' log-huts. For the rest of it, Captain F—— succeeded, like the able officer he was, in every object left for his services: the outposts of some annoying Indian savages were gallantly driven in by the marines, the sailors supporting them with great spirit, and setting the woods on fire to a good breeze upon the track of the villains; then a

stockaded nest of privateers was taken and destroyed, the deserted vessels themselves being carefully brought off. For the senior-captain was particular about prizes, of which various others were captured; finally, the loyalists of Chatham Bay and Charlotte Harbour were not only relieved, but supplied with stores, set free to provision themselves, and on the whole much cheered.

After this, there was nothing more to do in that quarter. The senior-captain, having intimated his intention of steering for New York to report to Lord Howe, and see after the prizes which were on their way thither,—at the same time allowed he had no further claim on the *Astræa*, which belonged to the West India station. The intercourse between him and Captain Herbert had been by no means cordial from the first; towards the end it had threatened to become unpleasant. After the court-martial business, he had requested the latter to come on board, and went so far as to express a pretty broad opinion that the signs of mutiny had been owing to the neighbourhood of sundry individuals who "had rather too new-fangled notions for him, and gave themselves airs, and had been unaccountably promoted over the heads of older men!" He "mentioned no names at present—he meant no allusions—no, *that* might yet be for a court of inquiry to make." Captain F——'s passion was still upon him; he said, "that as to such

a thing as a forty-four-gun frigate, he did not even understand it,—but if his report was to be of any consequence to the matter, why, he gave fair warning that such could not be very favourable on the whole; in short, he could not but think it a d—d useless, unnecessary luxury, only fit for a—a gentleman—who—who was the only one that ever would be able to boast of such a ship." The interview was their last, and it was short; shorter, in fact, from the manner of calm though quiet contempt with which Herbert turned to the hatchway, after he had declined to dine on board next day.

Really, it was well that Paul Jones had gone in a different direction; well, also, when they parted company, that there was even no keen American as yet, in a corvette heavier than a frigate, or in a frigate like a single-decked line-of-battle-ship, full of picked deserters, to come out from the rebel coast and meet Captain F—— with his whole squadron. He went home with prize-money in the end, ultimately to founder beside a convoy up the Baltic. He had a younger relative of the same name, subsequently rendered immortal as the commander of a British sloop-of-war, the *Spartan*, whose crew outshone by his influence the mythic grandeur of the Spartans under Leonidas of old; for they at last stood to their loaded guns against the broadside of a Frenchman of equal force, and yet did not lay a single loggerhead to their priming,

or pull the laniard of a single lock, but stood and were slaughtered there till their colours were struck overhead,—all to show the world and him that they were Englishmen, not the beasts for which he had treated them.

"Thank Heavens, Courtenay!" broke out First-lieutenant Holmes, in confidence to his next-in-command,—that first delightful night as the *Astræa* was rolling down the tail of the Trades, across the 'Stream, bound all alone again for sultrier waters of the Tropics. "Thank Heaven!—free once more!" And cordially did the second-lieutenant respond. The very motions of the watch on deck reflected it; the whole ship's company—down even to Jehoshaphat B. Malabaster, grimy with coals, with pig-feeding and under-cooking—echoed it by many a Saturday-night's toast, song, chorus, or yarn. They were perhaps better men, all of them, for having served under the *T—rt—r*,—even a little richer in view of some share in the prize-money; but certainly happier, safer, to be clear of her. The spring of 1779 had been thus spent; the summer was spread northward ere they had run down into its constant flood, off Jamaica, and beat up to anchorage at Port Royal. There, new orders were soon found. The need of cruisers and convoy-frigates was ever growing; the channels were infested with piratical craft from both Cuba and San Domingo; while outside went flitting

eager privateers, as well of Spanish as French build; and even the new flag of the colonies had become singularly troublesome at that distance.

It appeared, in fact, that their whole navy then afloat—so far as not shut up in its native rivers, or secured in its aboriginal creeks,—having unfortunately been at sea when the blockade grew close, had tried in vain to avail itself of that privilege; on the other hand, Lord Howe had been injudicious enough to declare the strict letter of the law against rebels captured in such an attempt; and the severity of "Black Dick," as seamen styled this admiral, was known to them for its unflinching nature, as well as for its literal justice. Thus baited about, it seemed, had been the unfortunate little squadron, under a national officer of great activity, and, as it proved, of still greater acuteness; but, from aught that appeared, by no means disrespectable in his character or origin, nor unreasonably desperate in his conduct. Probably unaware that the French fleet were now becoming so strong as to throw Lord Howe upon his own self-defence, it could not, perhaps, be expected that the only American commodore was going to put his neck into a noose so certain; his lordship even forbidding an honourable entrance into captivity till matters should be arranged. He had therefore boldly gone to sea, and kept there with a wonderful patience, evidently hitting at last upon some novel method both for security and success. Droppings from the

convoys had undoubtedly fallen to his squadron; and the very droppings were no trifle to them now, from almost the only commerce that continued to swim the sea, flourishing all the more as others vanished. It was thought "the commodore" took disguises—that he sent in his captures to the most unthought-of ports; found even a market for them in open water; sometimes merely exacted a ransom on the spot, or inflicted a reasonable fine. His squadron was one while said to consist of two or three brigs; now of a schooner or two; again of heavier craft, varied by these former; and he had been suspected to be present on dismasted wrecks, or feared to be about to come in rafts, even to rise from submarine engines of secresy: nor could it be certain whether he sheltered in lagoons of the coast, or disappeared at the back of distant reefs and desert island "*kays*;" or rather managed it altogether out of the known tracks of ships in main ocean, where the vague notion was that he bred live stock, kept poultry and fresh water, and on the whole made a harbour of it. Between supernatural alarm and a half-grotesque incredulity, the truth was, that the drunken seamen from Port Royal, and the idle Kingston negroes, threw the terror of this new enemy all over Jamaica. The worst of it was, that, being neither pirate nor even rebel privateer, but chief naval officer of a new belligerent power which everybody seemed about to recognise in spite of

fate,—the "commodore," if captured by any one short of Lord Howe, could not well be hanged without clear proof as to illegal deeds.

To have made sure in a moment that this was neither more nor less than his own colonial skipper of the *Dove* schooner, Harry Spencer did not need to hear the name, now notorious at Kingston. He was soon informed of a yet more relevant circumstance, by Broadby and Co.'s agents there, on whom he did not this time disdain to draw a cheque,—although, formerly, when leaving the dull *Dorothy* for the brisker *Dove*, at neighbouring quays, he had quite omitted to consult those sober friends of his. The summer export-fleet from home was now almost over-due—owing, doubtless, to the changeable weather near port at the present season, reported by two or three that had risked it, and had run in first. There had been advised amongst other news, by last armed mail-packet, one or two freights of value from the firm; also, one large ship wholly owned by them, with important assorted cargo—the *Cornucopia*—a new vessel, well-known to the lad as having too long lain in the floating-basin when first unloaded, during his brief career at the Froom-lane counting-house. A lump of a ship he knew she was, with ugly black lower-yards, and a foremast stepped too far into the bows—but A. 1, said to be fast; and, at all events, rather too solid a dropping to be pleasant, if seen

in the light of her falling into that long, sharp slit beneath the movable nose of the gimlet-eyed Itefell R. Dodge. He might style himself what he liked—Honourable Commodore Ahithophel Robert Dodge, commanding the United States navy in the South Atlantic, or not; but that this was he, and that he was no joke whatever, no one who knew the facts could doubt. *Him*, of course, the hurricane had passed by, in the full sweep of its circular, but partial course,—which had without doubt overwhelmed his mate, Abijah Hyams; even as the whirl of the current had driven the barque of the one upon the shoal, while it only served to carry clear of danger the hermaphrodite with the other. Dick Diamond had no sooner arrived at a slow comprehension of the general statement, along with the particular circumstance therewith connected, than he overran with the fulness of some sudden emotion—too provokingly like the joy of a stray dog upon the scent of his master, to be borne with if expressed. Soon, too, out of the abject, though not hopeless protestings of Jehoshaphat Malabaster's countenance—once seen by the galley-fire as the young midshipman passed,—there oozed an ill-boding gratification at the momentary vicinity; which communicated to Harry's mind a strange misgiving about the truth of dark presentiments and the odd coincidences of evil fortune.

Welcome, however—all the more welcome was the order for sea, which these news had tended to quicken; and all the brighter the blue evening land-breeze, all the brisker the surge from a quick ebb-tide, which drove the frigate to the offing on the look-out for convoy, with cruising orders. A fretting service at other times, in that quarter, when without much prospect of individual benefit. But as for those who had no home-firms to consider, nor higher sense of duty to sustain them, they were exhilarated by the new and lively conception of a Dodge to be run down, if not to be outwitted. And so bore through the baffling airs, the heat, the drenchings, the bootless starts and idle hearsays, that led from the empty channel once more, to bare blue circles of the rolling ocean.

Even when well out in the regular track of convoys from home, nothing met the active survey made on every side; but there were signs of a recent strong gale from the north-west, upon the drift of which the frigate shaped a southerly course, and was at length rewarded by a view of the scattered West-Indiamen in question. The *Druid* and *Sylphe*—an old two-decker forty-four, and a light twenty-two—were steadily gathering them as they beat up to the course of the night. The Barbadoes portion, as it proved by the commodore's signals, had been lucky enough to break off before the gale came; and, as regarded attack from any force in that quarter, were so strong in themselves

as to need but little further looking after. On closer communication, it appeared that, during the previous light weather, while still in company—off the easternmost "*kays*" of the Bahamas, one dark night—a sturdy and cautious Scot among the Barbadoes-men had beaten off an attempt at surprise from the boats of a seeming friend, taken, by her rig, till then, for a well-known barque from Glasgow, though afterwards made out as a hermaphrodite brig in full flight; while, about the same time, another ship—a Bristol letter-of-marque—well manned and armed, as they always were from that port, had fairly crippled, boarded, and captured a quiet schooner that slipped in upon them, crowded with ruffians armed to the teeth; half of these being blacks, indeed, and all afraid at first, of course, to use their deck-guns. The letter-of-marque had thus trapped the pirate nicely, carrying his men off in triumph to a port where there would be little trouble about the white ones, and great use for those that were at all darker in hue.

These facts the *Druid* made known with all due graciousness, as from a forty-four on two decks to one in the frigate form; still counting her convoy with no little pains, until the *Sylphe* had finally signalled from the most distant south that the *Rattler* brig-of-war, with the two very annoying sugar-traders she had gone to whip in, was still out of sight.

Now, the *Astræa's* first cutter, then alongside of the *Druid*, had conveyed the third-lieutenant himself, Mr. Dalby, to wait upon the Commodore—or rather upon the first luff of that choleric and raw-faced dignitary, who, in an unbuttoned and rather tight old uniform coat with new epaulets, and a white handkerchief as a shade over his cocked-hat, only frowned out of an upper stern-window toward the merchantmen; at whom his ship occasionally thundered ahead, while the *Sylphe* cracked them up from the distance. Up at the entering-port stood Mr. Burt, the gruff master's-mate; in the boat below stood his former rebel, young Spencer, now on sufficiently good terms to ask or get a favour of him—indeed it was well enough known in their own ship why Harry seemed anxious on the occasion; on which very account Mr. Holmes had quietly sent him in the cutter. He now specially requested Burt to jog Mr. Dalby's memory, before he left the *Druid's* quarter-deck, about asking what particular Indiamen were missing. This was in fact done, and on the other hand condescended to; though rather crustily from the cabin, requiring, as it did, some little further signalling and annoyance. "Full-rigged vessels Nos. 5 and 14," was the reply at last, "and H.M.S. brig *Rattler*. Commodore Bowen desires you to say to Captain Herbert, sir," added the *Druid's* first-lieutenant, in a sour manner, "that since his orders are so deuced particular, the Commodore will

thank him just to bear up to the suth'ard himself, and see to them. I may say, sir, the Commodore as senior officer, and commanding here, now *expects* it!"

Lieutenant Dalby was a very gentlemanly, spirited young man, known as rather a wit in the gun-room, but at the same time accustomed on shore to the best society: he bowed in a ceremonious style. "Nos. 5 and 14, and H.M.S. brig *Rattler*," repeated he, setting it down carefully on a tablet of a small ivory note-book he carried. "In case, however, sir, of the brig-of-war not being found in company, what *names* may I put down for the traders?" For Mr. Dalby, though very gentlemanly, was himself in some way connected with people in that class of life.

"Two full-rigged vessels, didn't I say!—Oh, here's the book at any rate," said the first-lieutenant, hurrying; "really I must leave you to it."

"'No 5, *Ocean Queen*, London, 500 tons, *very leewardly*,'" read Mr. Dalby, still writing it down; "'*Cornucopia*, Bristol, 700, *curst inattentive to signals*.'"

"So she was," answered the master of the *Druid*, who was left with him; "gave herself out for leaky, it's true—but sailed well when she chose, and my notion is, instead of foundering as was spoken of, she's run in ahead of us. Anyhow, if she's insured and aught's happened her, the underwriters 'll be the most *hang*nable fools to

pay for it,—that's all." The sailing-master seemed much amused at this thought, having himself ceased to have a direct personal interest in the merchant-service. The ivory-tablets made him laugh even more, when Mr. Dalby handed them to him with the polite request to get these orders signed by the British Commodore, whose "deuced particular" allusion was so carefully inscribed therein. Dalby felt by no means desirous of further convoy business for his own ship; he certainly could not think of carrying back a verbal message, simply as such: but he was quite content to take a summary leave over the *Druid's* side, when told that the master knew nothing of the matter—save and except what sort of a funk the commodore would go into, at sight of such orders for him to sign! "The commodore mayhap swore enough," said his sailing-master, gruffly: "but never to post-captains on paper, surely,—much less on infernal stuck-up bits of other people's ivory."

To the captain of the *Astræa*, however, there was hint enough in his third-lieutenant's report. Very soon, under a pile of canvas, she was bearing up before the breeze for southward, on the search deputed to her. Congenial instincts woke, and scented out new work, in the enlivened countenance of First-lieutenant Holmes; the feeling was gladly shared in various ways by all below him, except in the case of young Harry Spencer, who participated it with far too close a concern in the issue. The very

wind and water had assumed a look of knowing those home affairs, and of understanding those family connexions, which he could not help acknowledging. Not to speak of the old chance that had once brought him in contact with this unaccountable being, this privateer, this mock-commodore—here was he himself almost dragged back into service of the "firm," and merely cruising as a sort of supercargo for Broadby and Co. The well-known figure-head of the *Cornucopia* was in his dreams, pouring plenty upon him, but not of honour or good-fortune; each morning did he catch himself on the look-out for floating bits of her, for fragmentary gratings of her tops, stray spars that might be recognised, random casks with her mark. The view of her drifting stern-board would in fact have gratified him, or a bottle with papers, or a raft with men—just to get decently done with the business. He had a most uncomfortable conviction she would never be seen more, at least by English eyes: there was some instinctive sense in him, that Itefell Dodge was the cause, and that without hope of rescue; equally prophetic seemed the odd notion, that some time or other, perhaps when least wished for on his side, Dodge and he would meet to have it out. A bitter hatred to the man, which he never before had wished to admit, began to spring up unquestionably within him. The incomprehensible leers of Diamond more than ever irritated him, so that they had now no approach to the least intercourse

together; then again, when he chanced to pass that depressed and wronged colonial-man, Malabaster, he would fain have added an angry kick to the unvaried contumely that was thrown upon the fellow. Nay, there was a far higher source of awkwardness; for more than once, when Captain Herbert's eye lighted on him, or he had occasion for directer communication in that quarter, he saw plainly that there was a concern felt for his part in the affair, by the very directing authority itself, and a more than common consideration therefore shown. The frigate with all her force and speed seemed almost to be spreading her studding-sails on his behoof, and shearing the long swell aside, to the bare southward, on his private errand. He was somewhat at a loss to account for this evident interest in his cause, or in that of Broadby and Co., whose character and constitution as a firm he could scarce imagine the captain to know. It was by no means a state of matters to his taste, whatever way one took it. Above all, the idea was most unpleasant indeed, of being afterwards weighted in due proportion with the disappointment sure to ensue, or with the whole train of consequences that might accidentally follow. An unwelcome conviction deepened upon Harry, which he had of late vaguely formed, that the *Astræa* herself, however personally endeared, could not long be the ship for *him*—as one seeking fame, and seriously engaged to his noble profession.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SERIOUS QUESTION OF DICK DIAMOND'S IS SET ASIDE, OWING TO A FRESH AFFAIR OF STATE.

THUS it may be conceived what was Harry Spencer's entire satisfaction on the main point, mingled so far with relief on others, when the word came below one morning, just before decks were washed down, that all was right as to the brig-of-war and her two stray ships in charge. Daybreak had suddenly opened upon the active little *Rattler*, under easy canvas, some league or two off on the lee-bow: with the one ship but a little farther away, astern of her; while the other was visible to leeward as the southerly haze cleared—both jogging on with a spread of sail, as the brig's impatience seemed to fret and trample each passing billow beneath her forefoot. Along with the more distant merchantman, were two smaller strangers, almost simultaneously descried

through the morning haze, and taking the like pains to keep company; the one a Dutch-built, quaint-prowed, yellow-sparred topsail-schooner, with heavy round-house and long steering-tiller; the other a larger brig of similar air: both carrying the same red and white dovetailed ensign of Denmark, for which, indeed, their looks spoke the more readily beforehand, as their track was fair from the Danish settlements homeward. All were evidently alarmed at the frigate's abrupt appearance; the resolute spirit of the *Rattler* being shown by her letting fall more canvas, in the view to gain to windward before closing; while she plainly signalled her convoy to do the same, that they might edge off,—at the same time opening her ports and beating to quarters while the *Astræa* bore down.

The sight of her private number aloft, indeed, set all to rights. They were soon both heading the same course again, to north-west; in slow advance of the *Rattler's* troublesome charge, who did what seemed their very best in light winds, the two clumsy-looking neutrals included. These were sugar-laden Danes, homeward-bound, and actuated by a strong desire—which they had both expressed when previously boarded from the brig—to avail themselves as long as possible of convoy northward. They had nothing to fear, of course, but piracy, and were well enough armed; still, as there were rumours afloat, they feared it, having now been in company

ever since the brig-of-war rejoined the two West-Indiamen. As to the latter, the *Cornucopia* was but too glaringly at hand, not a mile astern of either cruiser, dipping the dark lower corners of her big white studding-sails in the swell, till the booms quivered; she had either spent her flying-jib-boom in the service, or lost it before, and they were busy rigging out another in its place, but still she was zealous in her part. She looked a fine craft enough, and could keep up there, no doubt, as long as her betters kept jogging slowly to wait for her. A most disgusting vessel to young Spencer; he loathingly eyed her black lower-yards and ill-placed foremast; at last, too, there rose and fell distinctly in view her eternal horn of plenty,—that kept pouring spray beyond the swell, from the hands of Fortune—like the fulfilment of nightmares forgotten. The *Ocean Queen* and the two Danes were leewardly, it was true, so as to fall off and lag worse than she, with even more sail spread for their size; but the "firm" always took credit for choosing good masters, the master of the *Cornucopia* being called about the best,—and yet here was she leaky, it seemed, as well as sluggish and gone adrift, giving all sorts of annoyance.

The veteran commander of the *Rattler* had died of fever on the passage out; his acting-successor, late first-lieutenant, now at once came aboard the frigate, with a most becoming readiness. The

Astræa was now in the superior place; and the keen survey of Mr. Holmes had no sooner been extended to all the circumstances, than, notwithstanding the evident experience and prompt conduct of Commander Sloane, he ventured privately to suggest some further steps on Captain Herbert's part with regard to the neutral vessels. "The moon rises late, and little of it at best," said he; "then again the weather may freshen—and, in short, though neutrals certainly *are* a delicate point, still I really don't just understand that one—the brig, sir, yonder."

While the junior commander was being entertained at an early lunch in the cabin, in which the frigate's surgeon and marine officer joined,—Mr. Holmes had, in fact, gone into one of the after state-rooms, levelling his glass along the gun through the stern-port. To his meditations, thus assisted, the neutral brig did not look as if there could be much sugar in her hold; he could not feel sure she was Baltic built, or, anxious though she might be to keep up with the rest, that she could not really have far outsailed them if she chose. After a second and a third inquisitive scrutiny, Mr. Holmes all at once laid down the telescope and came half out of the little library, with somewhat between the air of a secretary who has consulted a book, and that of a premier who has detected some dark conspirator in the cabinet of state. He took advantage of the interest felt in latest

home news by the surgeon and marine lieutenant, to request another moment of the captain's attention. "Would you just be so good as to take one single glance yourself?" said he.

The captain did so; but not having that lynx eye for professional details, nor that wakeful instinct for the game of life afloat, with which nature as well as habit had favoured his first-lieutenant, saw nothing except that the Dane in question appeared now rather more distant than her comrade, and, if anything, seemed better to windward than before.

"To windward! yes, sir, not a doubt of it; she creeps up on our quarter with as much ease as impertinence—but that's not *it*. Excuse me, another look as she lifts on the swell. I'll just bring the sight to your focus, sir—now, don't the particular run of her water-line remind you of anything, Captain Herbert? Or that blunt-looking up-and-down nose like the side-face of a sperm-whale—but *better* than sharp, for the purpose? Or that flourish of moulding from the stern, over her counter—though to be sure the gilding's painted over now?"

"As you mention it—yes—yes, undoubtedly," was the reply, laying down the glass. "Of a hermaphrodite—Spanish, if I recollect rightly. 'Twas when noticing the drift of a current, you remember, previous to the loss of that unhappy British barque on a shoal, which we were so

unable to remedy. Were it not that the Spaniard was so near, indeed, when that storm broke on us—why, Holmes, I should really say——"

"That brig, Danish or not, is the self-same craft altered, sir," said Mr. Holmes, with unhesitating confidence. "As to the hurricane, allow me to observe—they may be circular, or any shape the Royal Society please—I don't pretend to judge, but this I see as sure as I stand here, there are rascals about these latitudes who needn't much mind the odds. You are aware, Captain Herbert," added he, in a still lower voice, after speaking all along as if some such person as he described might be eavesdropping, not to mention the delicate vicinity of the junior commander, which was troubling Captain Herbert—"you are aware of the reports, sir, as to that brazen-faced colonial—I mean this —*ahem!* this American vagab——this fellow, Dodge?"

The captain smiled, and asked, "Is it possible, Holmes, you can begin to credit half of these statements! Does such an individual even exist, do you think?"

"More than that, I am sorry to own," was the grave answer. Mr. Holmes, with a flushing face, now startled his superior by the abashed attitude and suppressed tone in which he all at once admitted a certain serious fault on his own part. He quickly confessed the whole series of trifling discoveries—

dating from his impressment of the two men from the barque,—which he had refrained from making known on the ground that they might be apocryphal, and were useless. In this was included the actual presence of the fellow, Malabaster, up to that moment unmarked on board, as derogatory to the very dignity of a British post-captain to behold; also those slighter proofs which had transpired on the matter, through a coloured man, really an excellent fore-topman, named Richard Diamond, "who, Mr. Holmes had reason to understand——"

"I know, I know, sir," interrupted Herbert, with more than equal gravity. "But this is too serious to be discussed at present, Lieutenant Holmes; besides, in the case on hand, there is no time to spare. *I* shall lose none—*you* may possibly find yet, sir, that there are *no* trifles in his Majesty's service." He was opening the door, which Mr. Holmes had closed,—when he met the troubled eye of the latter, and turned, with a hand cordially held out. "I was certainly unaware, my dear Mr. Holmes," said he, "of any ground on my part for the least want of confidence, even in professional trifles! But I feel I need not remind you how injurious to the efficiency of the ship would be the merest appearance of this on any point—pray, let the matter now drop for ever between us! And now to be prompt; the weather may change, 'tis hazy at any rate, the night will be dark, as you said—then, our suspicion

points to an audacity well-nigh incredible—while again, we are on delicacy with the *Rattler*. In fact, I had intended at once to leave her free to her own charge."

He told acting-Commander Sloane so, on rejoining him; but found opportunity now to qualify the statement, from a consideration of those said strange accounts regarding rebel cruisers. In this view he thought it best, he said, that the *Astræa* should keep at hand a little longer. "The *Rattler* is as fast a brig as floats, we flatter ourselves," said her commander, rising briskly at the hint, though without troubling himself to look round at the suspicious sail, or her position: "We can soon overhaul her *again*, Captain Herbert—*both* of 'em if you wish? Neither vessel offered the least difficulty—I sent a good, steady mate in the boat, also a man who knew some Danish, having been up the Baltic. The papers of both were correct, the cargoes were looked at, in fact our worthy purser requiring a fresh bag or two of the same, as was natural after so lengthened a passage, 'twas readily sold—and so," here the acting-commander ventured to indulge a smile, "I can assure you, sir, as to its nature, if not its quality, which I must say was not quite to our taste!"

The marine officer sympathised by a laugh. "Green sugar," the doctor agreed, was sickly: again the captain of the *Astræa* looked away out, and might have hesitated more, but for the evident

circumstance that the neutral brig was now visible off his own weather-quarter, well past that of the brig-of-war.

"And may I ask, Captain Sloane," coolly inquired Mr. Holmes, "from *which* of the two it came?"

"Why, sir, I think from the *Emilie* of Copenhagen—yes, the smaller of them, the red topsail-schooner with the dolphin-head. The other is the *Twin-Sisters*, or to that effect—Sorensen or Sorken, master, same port. *She* was farthest off, and therefore second boarded—but it might have been had from her too, I dare say, if asked. The difficulty is, you know, sir, they're rather *too* hospitable!"

To this last remark Mr. Holmes agreed; but he suggested also, that by good luck, amongst the frigate's larger crew, there were two or three real Danes on board. "What you would oblige me by at once doing, Captain Sloane," finally said his senior in command, "is to pass to windward of me, bracing up sharp as if to part company for the northward, and allowing the Dane to keep her present course till you have her at command. After which, should her conduct alter, you will immediately go about on the other tack in pursuit, and bring her to. I shall remain steering as now, unless required to cut her off."

The *Rattler* had no sooner changed her course and dropped more canvas, however, than the questionable brig betrayed symptoms of such alarm as

the guilty are apt to take. The brig-of-war tacked accordingly, and stood direct for her; when the so-called *Twin-Sisters* of Copenhagen displayed an alacrity and speed in edging off, and at the same time in weathering on the whole convoy, which seemed to justify the darkest conjectures of Lieutenant Holmes; the *Rattler* at the same time crowding sail in chase with such promise of swiftness, as to require but little preparation in the *Astræa*. The latter merely went round on the same tack as her consort, keeping the light breeze more abeam than she, while ready to spread all sail before it: a change of course in which the merchant-convoy had but to share with all their power, so little did it signify by what slant motions they beat up again to their proper latitude.

They were thus drawing together, in reversed positions, toward the track which the chase must take if prolonged; when as the frigate quickened her way from behind, she passed close to windward of the *Cornucopia*. That bulky and solid-looking vessel, with vast expanse of sail aloft, diligently ploughed the brine as before; ugly shirts and trousers were fluttering from her, forward; slack ropes hung overboard, or dipped with swabs at the end, or towed clothes alongside; the caboose-funnel smoked; a lazy apprentice went aloft with a slush-can at his neck, and eyed the deck of the *Astræa;* a passenger with a Panama hat, and a cigar be-

tween his fingers, stood and stared from under the quarter-deck awning. The frigate's crew were at dinner, the few officers or men on deck surveyed that merchantman with something of the same sentiment that had driven young Spencer below from nearer sight of her. A blubber-faced mate had stood up on her weather-quarter as they approached, apparently desirous to communicate with Lieutenant Dalby on the quarter-deck. "Speak with the fellow if he wishes, Mr. Simpson," said Dalby to the boatswain, who was near the gangway. "Ship ahoy!" roared Mr. Simpson, as a mutual sheer towards each other was given, at a sign to either steerage-wheel: "What d'ye want, where's the master, if so be? *Hey?* D'ye know no better manners with a frigate than *this!*"

"John Mallard, master—well, he's gone down sick, some fever or another, he says!" such was the answering shout, as the mate of the *Cornucopia* ran along abreast of the gruff boatswain, towards the bows of his own ship. "Weather's been hazy, we've got our latitude but not so sure o' the longi-*tood*, could ye just——"

As the motionless boatswain's dignity required, the merchant mate still hurried forward beyond his outstretched sails, till he ended the dialogue off the very bowsprit of the *Cornucopia:* while meantime on her taffrail sprang up the solitary passenger, clothed all in white from his shady hat to his well-

blacked boots, whose wrinkles shone round the big bunioned toes, while he shrilly hailed Lieutenant Dalby.

"That Daner looked bad to me all along, sir!" he screamed: "Hope you're not leavin' us alone, Mr. Lieutenant?"

The sprightly third-lieutenant only returned an unintelligible bow; in fact, the odiousness of the Bristol West-Indiaman took a ridiculous shape in this passenger.

Mr. Holmes, the moment before, had come out of the poop-cabin, where he had been briefly stating his plan to cut short the chase as the breeze freshened. "Tell the boatswain to hail that ship ere she drops past, Mr. Dalby," said he, sharply; "they must take in those absurd lower-stuns'ls, brace up, haul taut their bowlines, the lubbers, and keep as near as possible in our wake!"

This was done and obeyed; inattention to signals or orders could not well be alleged against the *Cornucopia*, which now followed wonderfully. "She rolls like a cask, she'll roll the masts out,—where was her master, boatswain?" added Mr. Holmes, looking back: "Malley or Manson I know is his name. What was that they asked you, by-the-by, Simpson—you haven't said. Observe, sir, there are no trifles in frigates, there must be no omissions or misunderstandings of any sort here."

The boatswain had scarce recovered breath, but

he hastened to report that the mate was only anxious about the longitude, in case of an illness of the master's proving serious, which did not seem likely as yet; in reply to which he, Simpson, not being accustomed to keep notes of such "headwork," had confined himself to a very civil remark in the mildest language, with regard to the propriety of their doing the best they could to navigate without it. He said he had then kindly added, that if their master was the only gentleman aboard that could read a chronometer or handle a sextant, why, they'd better try if their surgeon could manage to keep him in his sober senses till they made Port Royal. From what the lubber had answered off the bowsprit, Mr. Simpson made out that the master was actually surgeon too, so the case appeared bad enough, if *rum* was not really what was wrong; which struck the boatswain as about the most candid opinion he could offer.

Mr. Holmes turned off, indifferent to the suggestion: his own thoughtfulness of late had been increasing, and it was plain from even the late vacancy in the *Rattler* brig-of-war, that fevers might break out at sea as well as off the Palisades at Port Royal—perhaps "yellow-jack" itself. There had been cases already, it seemed, in the West India convoy, and the *Rattler* at present had one or two doubtful: but meanwhile the frigate drew faster abreast of the other English vessel,

Ocean Queen, whose very dull and leewardly sailing threw her even farther to southward of the track. Signals alike with example seemed thrown away on this heavy-laden Londoner; even the quaint Danish schooner evinced a zeal and docility in keeping near, which the former, as if doubtful of the frigate's right to replace convoy, either could not or would not exert. The signal to trim by the wind and steer a higher weatherly course was enforced by a gun, and necessarily obeyed; but in a manner so unseamanlike and ineffectual for the purpose, as at length to draw a warning shot across her bows from the frigate, then about to start ahead at full speed for the *Rattler's* aid. The afternoon breeze began to crisp the backs of the long swells, fluttering her gathered but impatient wings; far against it, up the eastern crescent of the horizon, stood two dazzling piles of sail, as the brig-of-war still tried to gain to windward of the fugitive brig; and when the latter, turning edgeways from the light, showed both masts and began to creep direct away before the wind, the *Astræa's* curbed eagerness was no longer to be restrained from intercepting this flight. Yet at this very time did the *Ocean Queen*, cursed by a hundred muttered voices on the crowded frigate's forecastle, allow a boom to snap short in the breeze, as if through excess of diligence; thereby, in the most "soldier"-like fashion, broaching-to, hampering and further endangering herself,

with the still worse consequence of attracting the keenest notice of the first-lieutenant.

"Here is gross negligence—very gross indeed!" said Mr. Holmes, flashing an eye upon her. "Why, Courtenay, the man—I don't know his precious name, must be drunk, drunk without a doubt. They seem to drink in concert, I think! Stop a moment, though—hold on there with the courses and with all aloft, we've time enough." He had but three steps to take aft into the cabin, and soon came out in brighter mood. "Call away the first cutter, there!" he said: "Mr. Burt will take charge and go on board that vessel, superseding her master till the *Rattler* joins again. You will see how near our wake you can keep, Mr. Burt—the boat's crew will have their cutlasses, and take a file of marines, armed, in case of any trouble. *One* young gentleman only," added he, for Coventry belonged to that boat, and Harry Spencer was very anxious to join him. "Well, well, you may go, Mr. Spencer—none the worse of a young pair of eyes, perhaps. You perfectly understand me, Mr. Burt, I hope?"

"Ay, ay, sir—certainly—I do, Mr. Holmes," said Burt; and the boat was lowered away, and swept off on the heave of the swell, back for the wallowing quarter of the *Ocean Queen*, which sulkily received it.

The master of this ill-managed and sluggish

vessel, though far from seamanlike in appearance, was by no means the sort of man that might have been supposed. He was not only quite sober, but had the highly respectable air of something between a dissenting teacher and a quaker merchant; his tone was religious, and he was so manifestly vexed at the circumstances, that even Mr. Burt *felt* at having to request his immediate departure below to his own cabin, until matters should be arranged by Commander Sloane himself. The cause of his mishaps became evident at once; the merchantman had one of those "picked-up-alongshore-like" crews which the Tower press-gangs had left for her at home; out of which, between economy in the counting-house and further impressment from the men-of-war in convoy, she was even "short-handed" as to the hang-dog set on board. Two or three sulky fellows she had, the two mates in particular, who might have been unpleasant if better backed, were the frigate out of sight; the rest looked a medley from different countries, including a mulatto-blooded steward and a black cook of hideous aspect, who all fell in to the new system without a word. The whole were a trifle, at worst, to the hands of a picked cutter's-crew; the red coat and regular step of the sentry set over the arm-chest and pike-stand, seemed to work wonders in this way; the wheel itself became a new thing as soon as given over to Bob Jackson, larboard captain of the *Astræa's* foretop; while, as for black

Dick Diamond's exertions to lead the change on the forecastle, though obviously worst taken of all, and less than ever in good taste to young Spencer's view, they could not be denied as shaming these lubbers to do their best.

Hence the *Ocean Queen* began to mend her pace and look to windward, as the frigate's whole canvas was shaken out and spread; the *Cornucopia* having meantime rolled past in her track, with all the assurance of a clipper. The latter was even trimming yards like a craft that meant to see out the chase, nor to be far, perhaps, from coming in at the death, if not proving useful to the cruisers in the work. At the last minute, a little incident occurred, which drew a horse-laugh from Burt as he stood and watched it through the deck-glass of the *Ocean Queen:* the *Cornucopia* had gained within a quarter-of-a-mile of the *Astræa's* lee-quarter, when a boat dropped from thence, and pulled with a few flashes of the oars round the stern which bore the sounding title of Broadby and Co.'s best Jamaica-man. It hooked on, it hauled alongside; the way of the *Cornucopia* had scarce been slackened in return, ere an active figure in uniform sprang up her big black side, and another followed more cautiously, long-legged, with knee-buckled breeches and white stockings. A topsail was backed, boat-tackles were overhauled down, a midshipman and four men went up, two kept the frigate's yawl as it was slowly hoisted; after which the *Cornucopia* resumed her ploughing course.

The *Astræa*, from deck to trucks, was already a pyramid of snowy sail, three-spired, filled by the breeze's sprayey gush, as far ahead she sliced the billowy blue, driving straight along that bow-line which strung the crescent of the chase.

"The surgeon's-mate, by George!" chuckled Mr. Burt, none the less freely since he bade fair to carry his own charge again past her rival. "Ha! ha! Maclean, no less! They wanted a doctor, you know, Mr. Coventry—and the first-lieutenant's lent 'em one and no mistake! If sea-lawyering or slack-jaw 'll help the skipper's senses, why, Mack's his man."

"With the yawl," said Coventry, laughing too. "It's a boat that can be spared, and so can that lout, young Cobbinshaw, who's always been sent in it,—I knew him by the way he got hold of the man-ropes. Who was it had charge, though?"

"Robinson, I think,—my junior mate," answered Burt, with something of his old growl. "Ay, Robinson, of course. He always knows the ship's place to a second, and there *was* something about the longitude. The sugar-people wanted to know about it, d'ye see. I warrant me the skipper 'll know the longitude before we part company. Ha! ha! Mr. Holmes *is* devilish keen *too!*"

The people of the *Ocean Queen* appeared to catch here and there some droppings of the joke at hand, from what the man-o'-war's-men bandied about: one or two could be noticed to roll it in their cheeks,

like smuggled quids, with a stealthy leer to each other. Black Diamond, busy overseeing a gang of these—who coiled the ropes too much in the whaling style for his taste,—was nevertheless still more intently bent upon the distant chase; he slightly turned at some whisper among them, and with his half-savage wariness, seemed to gaze away again, but only with the whites of his eyes. "*Nigger!*" one black-eyed, sooty-haired foremast-man had seemed to hiss aside from him, with a motion and a glance that were smothered among the rest.

Harry Spencer had scarce caught the last words of Mr. Burt, which yet strangely fastened on him. All doing their best to follow the frigate, and keep up with the enlivened *Cornucopia*, the work on board the *Ocean Queen* was hard enough for the time; he merely watched the other ship with increased disgust and wild conjecture. The small neutral vessel dipped far astern and unheeded in their track, the swift splendours of sunset flamed up beyond, the quick night thickened hazily over the speck-like brig-of-war in full chase, whose guns began to speak—over the nearer purple points, too, that marked the fugitive brig crossing down the wind—and against the crimsoned tower of the frigate's canvas, hull-down athwart their course. Black Diamond came aft to relieve the wheel, just as Harry was bid keep the deck till Coventry got supper below; Mr. Burt and the two mates of the ship were good enough

friends by that time, and went down together, where even the superseded master was free to have joined them in the main-cabin if he chose. Diamond spoke quickly to Bob Jackson ere the latter left, in some muttered way which made even that brawny fore-topman start; he only nodded, however, tightened his belt, felt the sheath-knife at his side, and quietly passing the fresh marine who paced by the arm-chest, seemed about to join all hands at supper, down in the strange but jolly forepeak. They were noisily social there; the coffee, the beef-kids, the well-heaped bread-barge, had just gone down before Jackson, leaving a very pleasant scent: the grizzly black cook was the only man left on deck, belonging to the ship; and he was ugly enough in all conscience, but looked stupider still, crouching inside his half-closed caboose to smoke alone—for a toothache he plainly had—with his jaws wrapped in old red flannel; then the bandy-legged quadroon steward came along to him with a tankard of rum, that smelt best of all, and sent Sambo down below with it,—watching him to the ladder-head, but coming straight away back again, down the hooded cabin-stair. Meanwhile, Bob Jackson had suddenly stopped as the sentry turned, and slipping out some carpenter's tool or other, unseen, had then thought to dive midway down the dark half-deck hatch, without any notice whatsoever. He was a man usually as far beyond fault from the sharpest of midshipmen, as his well-known smart-

ness, strength, and courage were above their praise —but this time he paid no more attention to a call after him, than if it had been lost in the chaos of water-casks and cargo, along which he seemed to have vanished toward the hold.

"What the mischief is this, fellow?" said the young gentleman very sharply to Diamond. "You said something to the man, as I saw. If you and Jackson think to take liberties here, you're mistaken—I shall now report you both. He went down among the ship's stores just now, sirrah—though there's grog enough going, too, already."

"Here some mistake, sar," was the most respectful but hurried answer. "Nuffing of 'e kind as I knows on—quite different wot I whisper at Bob Jackson' wedder-ear 'bout dis here craft! I strike putty sharp me now, sar, he got o' some new notion ob him own—about sound de pump-well—a leak some-'eres—some-'at wrong about de hol', Bob take a his head, hey! S'pose I jiss go see a moment, masser Arree—for Gar' sake, yes, sar, one bressed moment—an' back in a twinklin'! No use kick up any bobbery yet, d'ye see, sar, if all right a de ship's hol'!"

"Gracious! Does the blackguard actually mean to give over the wheel to *me!*" ejaculated the youth, drawing back with dignity. "Luff, luff, sirrah—you'll broach the ship to, again! What the deuce d'ye mean, about the hold?"

"As to dat, Miss'r Isspencer," replied Diamond

with marked reserve, "you not allow me for consamine! How can say until such time as Bob Jackson tarn up on deck? Hope to good he ebber *do* —what noise dat, eh? Bressed like a trap? No offence, sar—but one p'int you allow I for to ax?" He had sunk his voice to a whisper again, pausing more to listen and peer, than for the leave he spoke of. "You tink our ole is Skipper away *yander*, now, Mass'r Arree?—jiss' a streakin' off a-loo'ard in dat darty ole' brig?" He made a gesture of uncouth contempt for the fugitive vessel—"Phoo! can't for a life o' *me* make her out no longer anyhow! 'E skipper too big for dat small craft dis time, or I'se blowed!"

"*Dodge?* that villain Itefell Dodge, you mean! Skipper, captain, or commodore, or whatever he calls himself?" said the midshipman, almost whispering the indignation he felt; for his unaccountable inklings of danger rose upon him again. "If that's not the self-same hermaphrodite, with Dodge in it, then I'm——"

"Hist! what dis a de cabin, sar?" hissed the excited Krooman, putting a sinewy hand on the lad's arm—"I darned 'fraid he a bloody sight nearer dis bressed momen'! By garsake, you look out quick for dat door o' dat booby-hatch! clap-to 'e *hasp*, my eye! Dar some shindy below a'ready—de skylight's all gone black!"

The glass frame over the lighted cabin had darkened down that instant, with a fierce blind scuffle

and a shatter of the swinging lamp: and even as Harry sprang to the upper doors of the companion-stairway, pushing them to, slipping in the staples, feeling for the padlock-hasp and iron eye—there were some of the hidden party jostling each other to run up. The stern-cabins seemed to have burst out with unsuspected desperadoes, favoured there by respect for the privacy of the superseded master, but too impatient to wait longer; half of them now clutching at each other, some fiercely snuffling for a light, the false master himself conspicuous by a sudden deathlike groan for aid from the Almighty, while the bubbling curses of one pretended mate from below the table testified to a first knock-down blow from Coventry. The surprised marine-sentry on deck had now set his strength to the hasp of the battered door, till Harry drove his bayonet into it: at that very moment, indeed, one tall fellow made a flying leap right out, off the cabin table,—but it was Jack Coventry himself, all bloody yet as cool as ever, snatching a capstan-bar from the nearest rack, with which he beat down his boldest pursuers right and left. A shot had scarce been fired from within, ere the skylight-frames were securely forced down and heavily smothered; and the few disposable hands on deck were thus busied when their real peril became apparent. The forepeak-scuttle was closed firmer still in turn, over the entrapped seamen of their party; with the old black cook, like a demon

in the dusk forward, silently boring his red-hot poker at it for some deadlier end: while one by one, from along the cargo below, the ship's scoundrelly crew were stealing up the half-deck hatch, to get at the arm-chest; at the same time, up astern from the windows on either quarter, it was evident there were some of the better-prepared villains cautiously mounting from their place of ambush. It was quite dark then, save from the heaving streak along the sky to windward, and the binnacle-lamp which Diamond had brought up to the wheel; he was leaning to his steerage as the breeze freshened, only nodding a doubtful sort of approval to aught else that passed—with something of the same questionable gleaming grin or leer, as it seemed, which now looked worse than treacherous: Bob Jackson, too, like one worse than a fool, was not at hand when most needed — though by chance perhaps free of the trap laid by that fiendish negro on the forecastle. Indeed, below all the uproar and desperation, there was even audible a hollow knocking and hammering among the casks, which proved at how madly unsuitable a time the infatuated man's rage for liquor had broken out,—a propensity never yet shown in the frigate, though virtually owned by Jackson himself to have been always irresistible ashore, or in the merchant service.

Just when the attack on the arm-chest grew more determined, the mulatto face of the cabin-steward could be seen to glimmer up from between

the stern-boat and taffrail. Intense was the horror inspired by his attitude as he crept over behind the wheel, with some ugly weapon in hand; it flickered near Dick Diamond's back, beyond all hearing of a cry to warn him, though he did seem to start and look round warily. The ship, already by no means well steered, flew up into the wind at the moment, with a crash that might have daunted an ordinary assassin; but at two or three murderous chopping flashes from his hatchet, the body of his victim fell doubled over the jerking spokes; the cold-blooded monster then turning, and springing on the stern-gratings to help up a comrade; while a third leapt up from the other side. The sight of this last figure, for an instant, sent even a more hopeless chill than all besides through the thoughts of young Spencer, struggling hard by Coventry's side. Bare-headed and long-haired he was, with a long knife between his teeth, and a belt full of pistols; from which he deliberately took a double-barrelled brace, and with a long stride was coming on,—when the marine, who had before clubbed his firelock, just as steadily turned it, cocked, levelled, and sent the fellow springing upright from the deck, shot through the heart. At the same time, the spanker-boom, shifting suddenly aft in the ship's flurry, a block or rope of the guys unexpectedly caught the mulatto where he stood up—sweeping him right overboard from above a cluster of his mates, with a yell that for the instant confused them. They

gathered, however, and gave out a wild war-whoop as they dashed across—the sneaking crew from forward having, by that time, forced the arms: even the few man-o'-war's-men that had found their way up were far outnumbered, and driven forward, along with the marine, Harry, and Coventry. The latter, who headed the defence with a coolness about as admirable as his skill and spirit, had already been lamed by a chance cut, and was giving the hopeless order to gain the fore-rigging, when all at once the villains were taken behind, up from their own main outlet of the half-deck hatch, by a rush of some dozen-and-a-half of stout fellows, —all too busy to utter a sound as they went to work —thrashing at it like farmer's men, with all sorts of off-hand tools. Bob Jackson led them, but the very busiest was a bald-headed man in his white shirt-sleeves [the real Master of the ship, as it proved], who used a short iron belaying-pin like a mad creature, and apparently with quite as little damage to himself as if it were a nut-cracker. A hearty British cheer, the next minute, testified to the effect; the deck being then so unquestionably retaken, with every piratical-looking individual that stood on it, as to leave but small difficulty with the few well-armed ruffians still left in the cabin.

It was now evident why Jackson had so mysteriously vanished, since poor Diamond's acuteness had led him to the conclusion that part of the real crew were imprisoned on board; and the herculean

fore-topman had thus thrown his weight unmistakably into the balance as it turned. A surprise more extraordinary yet was felt at Jackson's distinct assertion, that, but for Black Dick's rapid help in person below, these prisoners must have arrived too late for the pinch. Dick's butchered remains were now lying motionless in the shadow of the creaking tiller. But no sooner had the steerage been attended to again, and his shattered hat raised, than it became plain that Dick had made use of a savage subterfuge to represent his care of the wheel. The bundle of tarpaulin he had stuffed into his coat was scarce discovered, ere he appeared from the forecastle with the hideous old ship's cook in his charge,—after a pursuit he declared to have been most essential, since the negro was, beyond question, the worst blackguard on board, and most likely an Obi-man, if not worse still—a "free States-nigger."

Mr. Burt's still doubtful fate, however, was of more importance; and there were soon other serious considerations to keep in view. That the master's-mate of the *Astræa* was still alive in the cabin, became evident enough by the threats in regard to him, which the enclosed American desperadoes at first made in return for Coventry's warning to surrender. The distant guns of the *Rattler* had ceased to be heard; and, either as to her or the frigate, it was impossible to say whither

the chase had led them both: on the other hand, the usual convoy-lights, by that time duly hoisted aloft in the *Cornucopia* and the small neutral vessel astern, served to mark their widely-separate places; but there now arose grounds for caution in imitating this example, which were by no means to be laid aside because very similar doubts might exist on the part of these foiled marauders from the revolted colonies. The latter gave in at last, indeed; having first had the assurance to protest for honourable usage and respect to their private property, as being officers of the United States Navy under the broad pendant of the Honourable Ahithophel R. Dodge, now cruising in the Spanish Main: after which, without reply, their arms were taken up the skylight, and Mr. Burt received at the head of the stairs,—suffering from a wound they had not taken the trouble to heed, but still more from the cramping effect of their measures to keep him quiet, as well as fast. The various prisoners were then carefully secured below, much more comfortably, but at the same time on a more prudent system of separation, than their own recent plans might have suggested.

The half-moon having by that time risen, way was got on the *Ocean Queen;* moving her in the direction of the chase, which could once more be ascertained from aloft. Dead to leeward, in the southern board, the square canvas of the frigate

loomed up again, with the brig-of-war astern to east; the chased vessel had obviously taken advantage of the darkness to make a sudden shift of her course, but on a plan the least advisable for her purpose, as it threw the frigate at once to windward when moonlight came. A stern-chase, no doubt, might ordinarily be a long one; but the *Astræa*, with a breeze then freshening to a squall, was too fast through the water, and too stiff aloft, to let the proverb hold good. At length a gleam darted from before her, for an instant lighting up the remoter speck a-head, and serving at least to prove how near the frigate thought herself. Again, after a pause, flash singly followed flash with a measured determination that spoke plain of the first-lieutenant; the sharp reports coming slowly up the wind, like blows that had told. The *Ocean Queen*, once set before the wind, with a studding-sail or two risked to help, did wonders in pursuit; the *Cornucopia*, quartering the same way more prudently, rose full in view to windward as they passed her, not two miles distant. A fresh lantern was shown off the bulwarks of Broadby and Co.'s ship; the latter appeared to signal the *Ocean Queen*, in a way which Burt took for a reminder to show his proper light in the rigging, and did so accordingly.

"Robinson don't mean to be left astarn, though, it seems," growled the senior master's-mate. "And,

of the two, he's plainly got the best craft. Split her, for all that's been said of that *Cornycopeyee!* she knows well enough how to walk. Hold on the lower stuns'l, Jackson! Crack along! we've a boom or two to spare, see. By gosh! they must ha' been towing whole taws'ls under her bottom till now!"

As the *Cornucopia* rolled foaming after them in the dim moonshine, such words brought up in young Spencer's mind the wildest suspicion he had brooded on that evening; all that had happened was but a trifle compared with it. The dead American, whose grim body still lay stretched on a grating aft, was not Itefell Dodge, nor any one ever seen before by himself or Diamond; neither was the truth clear from what Mr. Burt had heard among the defeated villains, now doggedly silent, or from the liberated English crew. The latter themselves, in the *Ocean Queen*, had been surprised over-night from on board the fugitive hermaphrodite, before the *Rattler* took them again in convoy—not even a suspicion of this unpleasant fact appearing to be excited in their other consorts, or in the brig-of-war when she had rejoined them. As to the *Cornucopia*, if her size, full crew, and strong armament, were not enough to scout the notion of such another chance in her case,—she had run no risk of it at any rate; she had been a good distance off from all three vessels, when one of the Danes

(as it was then taken to be) played this trick—the other now proving quite innocent of the matter. Beyond the *Cornucopia*, certainly, had been another small craft, dismasted and in distress, supposed to have sprung a leak in the previous gale,—and to have foundered before help was possible, as she had been seen no more. Absurd, truly, to dream for an instant that H.M.S. *Rattler*, when she quietly took charge again, could possibly be escorting toward Jamaica a whole convoy of——no, good Heavens, what a thought! Harry Spencer drove it with a shudder from his breast. The seed of it all was the simple fact of that strange inquiry about the longitude; for there was one man, and one man only, among all captains he had ever heard of, who seemed, from time to time, perplexed by that problem; as if, like the spot in the heel of the ancient hero, this alone connected him with human frailty. In the schooner *Dove*, of Nantucket, he had never chanced to speak with a stranger at sea, but either personally or by deputy he put that odd inquiry in some form. Still, was not the query an innocent and a natural one in the circumstances? Besides, was not the boat of the frigate on board with Mr. Robinson, and with the surgeon's mate, Mr. Maclean, who was sent to cure Mr. Thomas Mallard, Master. She was squaring now in the wake of the *Ocean Queen*, with studding-sails set too in her turn, like a racer.

"Why, by George, sir—Mr. Burt," hailed Coventry off the fore-topgallant cross-trees, where he had mounted above the look-out man, "the frigate is hauling her wind; she is giving it up, by Jove! I can make out the chase, all whole, under the smoke of that last gun. She's fairly flown."

"The deuce she is! No—hang it—look again!" roared Burt, gazing up. "So close-run as you said she was, too!"

"Gone, sir," said Coventry. "What's that—a gun, the other way."

"Ah—and a heavy one, too," remarked Mr. Burt to the men near. Like a slow, heavy, distant echo of the *Astræa's* last, it came sullenly up the breeze: the frigate, close-hauled to beat up again, was now imitated by the *Rattler* in her track.

From the *Astræa's* look-out station aloft, while most intent upon her chase, a low bank of cloud a-head had been seen to give out sparks of light, for a time confounded with the glimmer of the sky and waves. Lights they were, however,—that seethed trembling out in line, from the uncertain gleam of the farthest ocean; remote on its other crescent, too, fainter but thicker set, the same strange lights came pricking up in shorter cluster: so that the puzzled topmen for some moments waited till an older seaman joined them, a lieutenant following up half way. Even the flying

brig hesitated in her course, and altered it, still rolling off to that quarter; when at the next sharp gunshot from the *Astræa's* bows, it could be seen off her lofty fore-topgallant yard that there was straightway dropped, as it were, from the distinctest of these lights on the southern horizon, a whole row of larger fiery spots—square and glowing like distant upper-windows in some factory by night, when a hill-brow still bulges the city out from view of travellers. Then a single tongue of flame shot forth from it, one instant glimpsing on the lighted parapet of a ship so heavy, that the swell yet hid her lower bulk—her dusky under-canvas falling against the gloom, her highest sails crowning it with a tremulous film, as she quickened her altering course. Deep and ominous, that answering sound had scarce crossed the breeze to the *Astræa's* deck, ere the latter had run in her own light bow-chaser gun, and braced her yards to starboard on the safer tack: the late object of her chase, as if quite assured on nearer proof, had hoisted a lantern-lit ensign at the fore, had filled sail on the old course, and was careering straight for the reported danger.

"They've got a striped flag up, Mr. Holmes, sir," said a veteran quartermaster from the lee-rigging, as he came down. "As to the stranger, sir, her lights were just a-wash a-head of us, a minute gone—you'll make 'em out off the poop

yourself, sir, with the lift of the sea. Right off the lee-beam *now*, I'd say. She's heavy, Mr. Holmes—to my thinking, sir, nou't short of a three-decker."

"That gun of hers said about as much, Riley," was the answer. "More than that—even our three-deckers don't carry such heavy metal above the lower-deck,—not to say that we've always, somehow, wonderfully few three-deckers where they're wanted! What bore would you say, now, Riley, that piece spoke to?"

"Long 24, I'd *swear*, your honour—ay, sir, neither more nor less, an' the 24-p'n shot wasted *in* it, too," old Riley said, thoughtfully. "They're noways thrifty, is the French about iron—many's the time, sir, aboard the owld *Foodroyang*, after Admiral Sir Edward Hawke got her from 'em, we've used to——"

Mr. Holmes was gone aft again, however, to the Captain on the poop, who had already seen the line-of-battle-ship's signal-lanterns. "She is edging back to her course again," remarked the latter. "Yes, doubtless, Holmes—French! The conduct of the chase seems enough to prove *that*—Count D'Estaing was expected, you know, in these seas. He has merely taken a false alarm at us and our convoy, yonder—his real danger, happily for us, cannot be far off, since Vice-Admiral Byron was sent in search of him. The clustered lights

reported to south-westward, therefore, must be the British fleet on the look-out, to cover the leeward islands. So that our case is less awkward than it might have been."

"True, true—both the *Rattler* and ourselves have the wind of them, luckily," said Mr. Holmes, with cordial readiness: "and keeping it well, of course, can cross safe enough to join the Admiral by morning. Shall we steer at once to westward, sir?"

"The two merchantmen, however, Mr. Holmes, must be first seen-to and brought with us," observed the Captain; "Count D'Estaing's frigates will be astir ere long."

"Good gad! I had nearly forgotten them, I must own, for the moment," was the first-lieutenant's perturbed exclamation. "And my two boats to boot! Brace up, Mr. Courtenay, brace sharp up and steer for the traders, till they can make out signals. See the lanterns ready, quartermaster—*danger to leeward—keep to windward of all convoy—steer same course as convoy—repeat signal to windward to all in company;* that's all simple enough. The moon going down, sir, favours us—the sooner she goes now, the better."

"The frigate signals now, Mr. Burt," said Coventry in the rigging of the *Ocean Queen*. "'*Danger to leeward*, I think? Well, that explains matters, anyhow. Of course, we're to keep

to windward—steer same course as the cruisers: I should say that's what they're driving at. *Repeat it* to the *Cornucopia*, I suppose? She's answering it at last—and I fancy, sir, as the *Astræa's* all dark aloft again, why, we'd better do likewise? *Dark* it is—lower away the lantern, you there, Diamond, my man—what d'ye see to grin at, my dark beauty?"

The *Cornucopia*, still a mile or so farther off to windward, had not for some minutes displayed her previous inclination to out-race her consort; the warning of danger in that quarter seemed to have reached *her* even sooner. The feeble old moon began to flare away beyond the west, like the horn-shaped back-fin of a shark on the long white-bellied cloud below her; she shed up a sickly grey light as she went, like a smoky lamp about to fail: all else was growing darker than before she had risen. It was just then that the *Ocean Queen*, imitating the *Astræa* and *Rattler* as they passed a-head, had hauled closer upon the starboard tack, to keep them well between herself and the risk in question; a change which—being less intelligible to the *Cornucopia*, as it appeared—threw that ship, ere many minutes passed, into the closest proximity she had yet held with her neighbour. With an evident desire to speak, indeed, instead of joining in the common movement, she now put up her helm and fell off from the wind, so as to be rapidly

brought down toward the weather-quarter of the latter; where Mr. Burt, with his main-topsail backed to wait, jumped up and looked for Mr. Robinson on the other's coming bows. As she came on, sending a curl of spray along the swell before her, the great gilt figure-head stood out to that last weak glimmer in the west, for ever emptying its brass-colored horn like a charm on the waters. Suddenly, as if to prove the mockery of the image, to one side there rose a smaller figure over the black knight-heads and anchor-gear, against the shadow of the foresail, putting a tin deck-trumpet to its mouth and blowing a shrill hail down the wind:

"Ahoy, the *Ocean Queen*—ahoy! How goes it?" The Union-jack, fluttering off at the mizen-peak, for a moment or two attracted some attention from the *Cornucopia*. "Ain't you Captain N. P. Rodgers?" wildly shrieked the trumpet. The whole length of the Bristol ship was then swiftly drawing past, to cross astern; that hailing figure swelled distinct to view from the *Ocean Queen* as she rose and fell.

"Who the —— are *you?*" roared Mr. Burt, with the lungs of an angry bull. "Where's Mr. Robinson?—Brace round the yard, there—up helm—clear away the carronades—cover that fellow with your piece, sentry—*fire!* He's the best mark—it's that blasted passenger!"

The *Cornucopia's* whole bulwark had all at once swarmed up with men, from sallow-faced down to pitchy-black—a busy cluster of the latter yelling and tugging at a gun, to which one came running with a lantern; the white clothes of the said passenger were seen as his deck-coat blew aside, while he pressed a glazed pilot-hat firmer on his head, and made a sign in-board. As a striped and spotted ensign flew up abaft, he made a stride along the *Cornucopia's* bulwarks, kicked the match from a zealous negro's hands, and turned his keen face in the lantern-light toward the flapping canvas of the *Ocean Queen*. "Tarnation—No! hold on!" screamed he. "No use, we couldn't fix it nohow. I guess I've about done enough, this turn—didn't just expect to get clear so easy. You'll treat the captain well, now? Same here."

Squaring off from the breeze, the *Cornucopia* had turned her stern ere the *Ocean Queen* was half round; every light was dead out in her; the random British shot or two, sent in pursuit, were not returned, while, with a speed never before attributed to her, she went a-head in the dark. Only when the *Rattler*, at the alarm, had wheeled round and come up on another tack, was it made out by the spread of studding-sails in the *Cornucopia*, that she was running dead before the wind to southward, where the horizon now quivered with the lights of the nearer fleet.

"The frigate seems to know what they are," said Coventry. "The more to windward of her we keep, I fancy, the better for us when we get on board again—night-signals are the very mischief."

"I don't mind so much about Maclean," growled Burt: "but poor Robinson and six good hands, you know, they're something. Robinson was good enough company, too—then, Mr. Holmes 'll be like a sick bear in the morning. As to that lout, young Cobbinshaw—and for that matter the *Corneycoppy* as well, why, sink her, she's well rid of!"

"*Hush!*" whispered the tall midshipman, with a look towards Henry Spencer, who leant stupidly against the side. "His father's somehow connected with the owners, if not owner himself—I don't very well understand. The insurances mayn't cover her, you know—'faith it's no trifle. That infernal passenger—*hang* him! Some of us saw him well enough before—but as luck would have it, neither the darkey nor Spencer did then, being below. If either of 'em had twigged the blackguard for a moment, they say now, all would have been blown! They'd have smoked his false rig, anyhow he set it—and the ship, cargo and all, been saved! Can't be helped, of course, but what's more—— the frigate would have nailed this Yankee commodore on the spot!"

"Yankee commodore?" said Burt, in his rough way. "What d'ye mean—you don't mean for a moment to say he was aboard—that that Dodge was——"

"It was Dodge himself, man, don't you see," said Coventry. "The passenger in white was Commodore Dodge."

Mr. Burt was overwhelmed by the astounding statement; which seemed to open depths of thought beyond his comprehension, for he stood looking out silently. Even a tumbler of grog did not loose his tongue; he took an hour's turn of rest on the stern-gratings, under his watch-coat, and slept upon it.

Sleepless till the morning broke, Harry Spencer thought it over in vain; and still thought it over, like one who had lost some mental faculty by a stunning blow. Dodge, truly—Commodore Dodge! And how was it that this Dodge had been almost providentially known beforehand to Diamond and to him—yet known to no apparent purpose?

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED HONOURS: — AND THE STORY CHOOSES A MOST UNSUITABLE TIME TO CONNECT ITSELF.

GLORIOUS broke the earliest day of the tropics upon the purple darkness of the eastern main. Even as the shadowy old moon lies clasped in the keen crescent of the new, so dark, so gleaming, but in proportions vastly magnified, spread to view the fresh embrace of old Ocean to young Aurora, ere they parted for another day. Cheerier thoughts ever rise at the new spectacle, each time so magnificently varied—when upper stars vanish into rifts of midnight that close above; when the last phosphorescent wave blackens down and rises cold, and the chill of the dawn blows in the snowy spray, and the eastern cloud crumbles apart into broken outlines, with old, old faces in them, edged by still white braids, like the faces of the forgotten

and the dead. Quickly shot the seeds of light from gloom to gloom; the spots and lines of radiance joined and kindled; a saffron space flowed out behind the violet bars; then fair grew all the lower heaven, and clear and pellucid, sending up a mottled glow into the sky, as of rose-leaves and of butterflies thrown high before the blazing spears of sunrise. Westward, and round the north, and all across the torrent of washing light, with its crowned arch of viewless glory, not a speck broke the swelling ocean globe—save the bright wet flying-fish at hand, as they fluttered from lustrous slope to slope, letting the baffled albicore sink from sight like great ripe floating cucumbers, or the sharp solitary dolphin dart through into the blue valley like a living rainbow —save the dark horned backs, too, of some school of huge black-fish rising to windward, and the pair of white tropic-birds skimming a-head, and the flock of sooty little diver-ducks that ran and dipped in the frothing wake of the ship. Far in the southern skirt of morning, certainly, askance off her larboard quarter, the horizon quivered, and dazzled, and bristled with a long fringe of danger; there were jutting points in it which glanced and swelled nearer from either flank, and which the uncertain breeze of the day might hasten. Thus seen, indeed, out of the deep-laden and sluggish merchantman, with the light brig-of-war and the

buoyant mass of the frigate blotting half its risk from view—nay, checking their speed on her behalf—it was all the more distracting to behold this latter novelty. Frightful floating harbour that it seemed, to an unheard-of country; where the vilest criminals escaped justice at the last moment, and then sent foreign bullies out to take revenge.

There was a tantalising haze a-head—a gauzy, lustrous, far-spread obscurity, as on a dewy autumn morning at home: on which every eye was turned with a painful suspense from the deck of the *Ocean Queen;* for the *Astræa's* grounds of confidence were still less intelligible there, than were her signals to leeward. But suddenly, within the haze, there broke a flash and smoke-wreath; the quick report seemed shedding transparency around, as the whole canvas of a lighter frigate towered in sight like cloth of gold, above her dotted white streak and jet-black hull, not a mile away. Her long blue pennant flickered on the breeze aloft; the radiate colours of the Union glowed in the corner of her blue ensign at the peak: beyond her there loomed up, in long succession, the grey shapes of a column of line-of-battle-ships under easy sail to the northward. Eleven of them were counted there, with the white red-cross flag of St. George displayed; and as the mist dissolved, nine more were soon made out abreast in the lee-line, hull-down a little farther off, and more astern. Still

in the rear came up some half-dozen sail of transport ships; a lively "*repeating*"-frigate shot along between, in the distance tacked about a cruising corvette; while an active look-out cutter came tossing-in the other way from swell to swell.

Most glorious sight this of all, it crowded out the loathed impressions of the night: the very annoyances of late days, and the bugbears of the future, fled before that imperial spectacle. As the hot day rose, how did that moving epic magnificence grow palpable, and branch forth in order, whose stern details were quickly taking emphasis for the *Astræa*. Her private number, with that of the *Rattler*, being set aloft, the admiral's cruiser pursued its way, with the signal to pass astern of the fleet, and join the rear of the lee-line; the brig-of-war and merchantman being consigned to a place among the obscurer train in convoy, destined for the relief of Barbadoes and the other southern islands which Count D'Estaing threatened. Thus the *Ocean Queen* was now given over to the charge of her own crew, and left for the time—the *Astræa's* boat returning at once on board. Brief explanations satisfied Mr. Holmes now; the unquestionable claim for salvage would partly have consoled him; but it was more to the point that he had graver matters to contemplate. The rear of the nearest column—the "weather-line"—was closed by a noble ninety-gun ship, the *Princess Royal*, the

only three-decker present, bearing at the main the commanding Admiral's flag — *blue* — of the Honourable John Byron (famous in narrative of well-borne disaster, and thence familiarly yclept by seamen, "Foul-weather Jack"). His next-in-command, Vice-Admiral Barrington, in the *Prince of Wales*, seventy-four, led the advanced van of this chief division; which, taking the honorary position toward Count D'Estaing, but warily using the unsettled breeze, was steered aslant under its easiest canvas, on such a course as it seemed the enemy must cross at last, if their still slower motion were but resolutely prolonged till the afternoon. Hours before that time, the experienced admiral could hope to be favoured by the land-breeze from the islands he defended; and every one knew, from John Byron's reputation, what use he would make of this. Could he but have commanded a good westerly "sniffler" from the blest Azores, even a wet and roaring zephyr out of the Upper Atlantic, breakfast would not have been well over ere he went to work.

Even as the frigate moved across his "wake," standing for the "red" squadron, where Rear-Admirals Hyde Parker and Rowley led, grand it was for young eyes to see—the very maturest brightened up at it—how the old battered and shipwrecked pensioner kept both columns of his force in hand, ready to join in one long rush to

battle; or, if possible, to lock it in between them for some issue more decisive than the French had yet allowed since this tantalising war began. He had well approved himself in every previous stage of service; and here, at last, had been given to his uncontrolled disposal an array of strength so complete, so effective, so free from the factious drawbacks which had lately divided Keppel and Palliser, or the weak subjection to mob-politics that had formerly ruined Byng, as to cheer all British hearts at the coming occasion. True, with the sole exception of his own three-decker, there was no ship in either column above a seventy-four —of which useful favourites no less than ten were visible. The whole lee-line was indeed miscellaneously composed of still lighter two-deckers, save those of the two rear-admirals. So much the *Astræa* made out as she crossed Admiral Byron's stern, to join the remoter track, saluting the flag-in-chief while she did so. Meantime, out of the upper stern-gallery of the noble ninety-gun ship, amidst a throng of laced uniforms of different hues, slowly came out an old man's spare and stooping figure, in plainer blue and white, but with the ribbon and jewel of some illustrious order upon his breast; and by the deferential movement to give him room, as he took a glass to survey the new-comer, it was evident that Vice-Admiral the Honourable John Byron looked with peculiar interest at the *Astræa*.

The consciousness, not only of her beauty, but of her surpassing size as a frigate, so communicated itself along her well-manned decks, that not only midshipmen, but forecastle-men, stood proudly—yet careful not to be seen prying in return at the admiral. Far below Dick Diamond this sense extended; for even Jehoshaphat B. Malabaster could be seen setting himself edgeways, doubtless to be as like a mere streak of colonial life as possible, being by chance on deck. An unquestionable sensation had been produced in the fleet by the new frigate—of whose existence they must, of course, have heard, if not of any achievement yet performed by her; in fact, the admiral was observed to turn to his captain behind—who for a moment or two disappeared. Then a fresh signal aloft was added to the many which had been set flying; and as the *Princess Royal* was left on her stately course, the light repeating-frigate a-head of her wore round from between the two columns, and came rapidly shooting towards the *Astræa*. The signal had referred partly —so it was alleged by Coventry, her own signal-midshipman—to something about "despatches."

Grand it was to watch meanwhile, as they crossed amongst it all,—between the two lines, now gathering up to close in one,—a-head of the baggage-train, which also got signals to quicken it. In either line, to see how steady they kept their

places, two cable-lengths a-head of one another; all uniform at the slightest change required, if not exactly as to the same easy spread of sail that expanded midway aloft—since here and there, one or two needed reefs to check the force of their set top-sails, while others had top-gallant-sails above to help them. Then, few indeed were new, "*clean*" ships, fresh from home; still fewer were sheathed below, like the *Astræa*, in copper that made the question needless even in the Tropics, where it signifies most. As to all this signalling, and this show of flag-ships and admirals, it was troublesome, perplexing, and well-nigh overawing to the *Astræa;* breakfast was ready, and they were hungry for it, but they were not now, it seemed, to be piped down to it till the general signal flew—which signal, at the same time, Coventry was of opinion, had far the likeliest chance to be clear to his comprehension. Nevertheless, what a sustaining and gallant sight it moved athwart them! The morning was that of the anniversary of His Most Gracious Majesty's birth: hence over all the taffrails of the fleet there rose somewhile an early show of flags, for which leisure might fail, later in the day; meantime the rich heraldic blazonry of the royal standard of Britannia surmounting all, though without the customary salute, reserved till noon at soonest. Under this transient display, as the great square shining stern of the flag-ship towered away, tier over tier from her solid

transoms up into the trophied entablature of Britannia and her armorial symbols—the old Vice-Admiral lowering his blue anchor-flag at the pinnacle of all, till three strong cheers were heard upon the breeze from both lines, instead of guns—then in the hurrahing *Astræa* there were many hearts so full with a strange new emotion, as thoroughly to regret her supposed trivial part in the business. They could have cried, that moment, to recollect she was only a frigate—a superfluous one too!

But the lofty weather-line swept on, with greenish shadows cast far alongside on the swells of the tropical Atlantic, which scarce heaved the mighty range of their castled splendours:

> In them behold,
> Upon the hempen tackle, ship-boys climbing;
> Hear the shrill whistle, which doth order give
> To sounds confused; behold the threaden sails,
> Borne with the invisible and creeping wind,
> Draw the huge bottoms through the furrowed sea,
> Breasting the lofty surge: O do but think
> You stand upon the rivage, and behold
> A city on the inconstant billows dancing;
> For so appears this fleet majestical,
> Holding due course.

The van of the lee-line was rising pale by comparison in the sun's uplifted glare, but close on the course of the *Astræa;* which had just slackened her way to fall in with its coming rear, when the *Bedfordshire* repeating-frigate hove-to astern, and

sent a boat aboard with home-despatches from the Admiral's charge. Further communications of the Admiral's own were evidently at hand, for the barge of the *Bedfordshire* was also hoisting out to follow.

The important letters for Captain Herbert had scarce been opened by him, indeed, ere the captain of the other frigate was himself seen on the way to the *Astræa's* side. There Herbert shortly after received him, with a welcome no less cordial than his surprise was obvious at the meeting. A former commander and warm friend of Herbert's, Sir Charles Douglas was by no means to have been expected in a mere *frigate* on such a scene; he had, in fact, commanded the *Stirling Castle*, sixty-four, in Keppel and Palliser's late deplorable action off Brest: since which he had taken out the *Bedfordshire* with these same despatches for the West India station. In Captain Herbert's share of the latter, there had now already been conveyed personal news —if not an announcement of actual happy fortune —such as most men would have received joyfully, even in circumstances like the present. Sir Ralph Herbert of Kingswood was dead, and his family solicitors had now duly and formally acquainted his nephew and heir-at-law with the fact, which few were likely to mourn.

With features singularly grave, however, save from the said expression of friendly pleasure, the Captain of the *Astræa* hastened to lead his guest

to the cabin under the poop; where they were left to the close privacy implied by such a visit at such a time. "I have certainly a few quiet words for your ear," continued Sir Charles, throwing his quick glance from the newly-opened papers on one table, to the plain breakfast-service which had just been spread on another. "*This* must be my apology for following your letter-bag so quickly—besides that there is no great interval to dispose of. Still, we are in no such hurry that I mayn't congratulate you, my dear Sir Richard!—ay, and if you'll allow me, share your meal too? Haven't had time to take it in the *Bedfordshire*—she will keep abreast of us, between squadrons, till they close up a-head."

"No such hurry, I repeat, to pack the *Astræa* to her station!" he persisted. "No—time enough when the rear comes up and closes to windward, near an hour hence. However eager the Honourable John Byron may be, Monsieur Comte D'Estaing does not seem to appreciate the feeling—I fear 'twill be afternoon ere we see him at earliest! Really, Herbert, as I may venture to say I repeat the Vice-Admiral in all points, you may take my word for it—ring for your coffee, send out your orders, and what I've chiefly to say will better keep cool than the breakfast! It's 'ill to fleech a fasting man,' as the Black Douglas said of old—at all events, I can speak for myself."

"What force, then, are you aware," asked his host, while carrying out the advice, "has D'Estaing in hand?"

"Ah—we're aware—certainly," said the other, as he rapidly helped himself to the repast. "For days the same tactical farce on the French part has been playing—both to get up their strength and to prove ours, you know! Tropical waters are the very best field for D'Estaing's practical application of Father Paul Hoste's book—and Suffrein, 'tis said, is applying the system more skilfully still in the East Indies—where, however, Sir Edward Hughes is at least his match."

"Hoste's system, I think," returned Herbert, "is drawn from our own practice in former times—the Abbé Horne was familiar with it—I have heard him mention it as excellent against superior force, in keeping things undecided. Our own fleet, then, I presume, is the stronger of the two?"

"Twenty sail of the Line,—including the *Buffalo* yonder in that category!" said Douglas; in a tone of sudden annoyance, and with an abrupt start to see out of the starboard quarter-port behind him. "Look at her, my dear fellow—judge for yourself, Herbert!—Twenty sail of the line, two frigates, a corvette and a cutter, (exclusive of yourself, with the brig-sloop and the sugar-ship you brought)—against twenty-five heavy, clean, real line-of-battle ships, *all* coppered, and ten frigates. No, as usual,

the Count holds the cards at last, and means fight —and *so* of course, for the last part of it, does Vice-Admiral Byron. Worthy old 'Foul-weather Jack' always does—always did. No matter, it's a painful subject, my dear Herbert—my dear *Sir Richard*, I ought to say, begging your pardon! So allow me, as I said, to congratulate you on the piece of good-fortune I had the pleasure of bringing out to you—if I scarce can say so, in any view, to the *Astræa*. The truth was, as you may have already inferred, your friends at home were aware as to the conditions of the old Baronet's will, and lost no time with the Admiralty, whose despatches to this station conveyed full powers on your behalf. The good old Vice-Admiral is quite aware of the circumstances, and, in short—in short, I may just as well say it at once, Herbert, you are free at this moment. The *Bedfordshire's* part in the present business is, so to speak, volunteer—'twill be over with the evening, after which she may be sent straight home under your charge, leaving a very good substitute —very excellent indeed!" Sir Charles looked round the cabin and out at every opening with extreme relish; Captain Herbert could not but perceive, so far, the nature of the proposal.

"The *Astræa* is in her way all that could be desired," replied he, slightly smiling. His eye was at the same time fixed on the marked proportions of the ship pointed out by his friend some minutes pre-

viously: last of the passing rear-column, it closed the somewhat ill-assorted array with a bulk and stature which, compared to even their smallest sixty-four-gun liner, were strangely stunted. As Herbert counted the ports in the double tier of her short, humpy, bulbous hull, her rigging showed none the less trim and taut; she carried her topsails bravely, and kept her place with seamanlike precision, as if swelling to deserve it. "I see, Sir Charles," he resumed, "a *two*-decker forty-four. The *Buffalo*, you say? The truth is, irrespectively of the *Buffalo*, my first-lieutenant and I had already drawn the inference which, I think, you had meant just now to suggest—but which the position of that ship makes perfectly clear."

Sir Charles Douglas's dark, vivacious features were again moved with a repugnance at the very sight of the vessel in question, which in other circumstances might have been humorous. "Do not talk, pray, of the disgraceful, I had almost said the —the beast of an object for British seamen to contemplate at this day! She belongs, they pretend to say, not to line-*of*-battle, but to line-*in*-battle—that's to say, with the red-tape folks, just when better can't be had—so here she is! I'd make a fire-ship of her, by St. Andrew!—I'd turn her into a sand-barge to drift down across their tactics, by Jove! And—and, d'ye know, if she were but put in the *middle* instead of astern, no such bad idea

that! Come, though, Herbert—harkye—with a baronetcy, and twenty thousand a year, *fresh-got* —why, it's a very different matter for *you*, carrying even this fine heavy frigate into action against French line-of-battle, than for me, observe, a poor, ambitious, restless, troublesome Scotch——"

The hand which his friend laid on him was firm though quiet; the fresh smile that accompanied it was perfectly tranquil. "My dear Douglas, what I tell you will at once set your mind at ease on the point," said the newly-invested baronet. "This title brings me almost nothing with it, save on the condition that within six months from its date I go home and——"

"Oh, we know all that," broke in Sir Charles. "'And merely make the customary public professions,' you'd say—quite lawful now, by-the-by—to accept transubstantiation and the Pope, the Pretender being left out, of course. Perhaps honest old fat Davy Hume has infected us north-countrymen, but still I don't see, if you like thenceforth to give up the service—which is the worst of it all, and if you're not obliged to turn monk, and observe celibacy——"

"Enough, Sir Charles—excuse me, but there is no such question, and the matter must now end," Herbert more sternly said. There was a deep sudden colour on his forehead, that left his features white as he touched his letters on the table; adding,

"I have other news here, which, were the *Astræa's* danger certain—ay, were her fate upon the cast—would render me, at least, heedless of it." The slender Italian handwriting of the Abbé Horne was spread over the open pages, on which the lawyers' packet still lay half-closed, with its official tapes, seals, and new titular dignities. "There are other lives, no doubt, to consider in such a case—many of them with the sweetness of life still in prospect, and all with the common title to enjoy it fairly—but this frigate's use to their king and country must bear me out. Let me remind you, Sir Charles, of the time I require—that *other* forty-four has now drawn abeam, and your boat, if I may be allowed to say so, should now haul alongside."

"By all that's good and gracious!" ejaculated the *Bedfordshire's* captain, as he sprang up to go. "To see what is actually required of English pluck and patience, by matter-of-fact English pig-headedness and custom, so far on in this boasted eighteenth century, is enough to make Scotchmen weep as they stand by! I've got to stand by and mind the signals in a repeating-frigate, by George! I own it struck me there might be something else done with this fine ship, Herbert—something new, you understand—something to *prove more*, I mean, for next time, and for every time coming! But it's too late now to speak of it—the signals are wrong, the system's wrong, the very ships' hulls and batteries

are wrong, all but their rigging aloft, their handling, their crews, and their officers—and there's but one flag-officer living who could head them as they need at this moment. He, you know, is still on half-pay, lately exiled through election-debts, and but the other day mobbed in Paris on his way home, after a far grosser insult!"

"Sir George *is* home, then!" was the delighted rejoinder. "Surely, politics aside, they must now give him the chief command at once? The late first lord, who sent forth Lord Howe, in spite of every prejudice, to New York, who never fails to help forward your own professional inventions, Sir Charles, and through whom even the *Astræa*——"

"You have not heard that Lord Hawke—the glorious Hawke—is no more? He died a day or two before I left Plymouth. His influence is not gone yet, though—Rodney will doubtless have a fleet—a grand one, it seems, with no less than a prince of the blood for one of its middies, and moreover, *parva componere magnis*—with something like good Scotch theory to back our hard-headed British practice! Nay, nay—my *own* conceit is not just so full-blown as you may suppose, Herbert. True, Sir George's personal friendship offers me a post which—no matter—but I *did* come out with an eye to merit it better, by a little spying upon the French trick of fence. And thus my lengthened trespass on your patience."

"Why, as both columns are beginning to close a-head of us," said Captain Herbert, turning from a window that looked forward, "the *Astræa* has but to drop to leeward when the rear passes. I indeed guessed, Sir Charles, that with Admiral Rodney's flag hoisted, his captain-of-the-fleet could not be very difficult to name. *This*, then, speaks volumes for the whole nature of the next campaign afloat!"

"Rodney has heard of yourself, my dear Herbert," pursued his eager visitor, "and, please God! shall soon hear more. I tell you, man, my barge can keep for a minute or two—well, tow it astern, there's only a little further pull to the *Bedfordshire*, which, happily, can repeat signals without me. I've a word or two still as to your ship, since I'm not to have the direct benefit of her? After all, you'll come into action at *last*—the enemy's fire will have cooled a little then,—there's a chance you may notice something worth the trouble, you understand? As a favour to me personally, Sir Richard, come and dine aboard the *Bedfordshire* to-morrow, at five? This is an odd occasion for the request, you'll say, but the times are odder still, mind ye—everybody seems to be feeling after some grand discovery to change 'em, but can't! Even Rodney, if he does it, seems but to mean hammering at 'em harder—for my own part, I only begin to see they've taken some turn, since last war, that makes hammering

useless. The French have certainly fallen on a system that enables 'em to laugh at it—in short, they've transmogrified themselves all at once from hot iron to the coolest india-rubber! To prove which, John Clerk of Eldin has been writing a book, and wants the new fleet to carry it out in triumph. A book of Naval Tactics—yes—by a landsman! A Scotchman he is of course, one of our retired Edinburgh lawyers, who in his youth had a seafaring notion. Come, though, don't look so solemn, Herbert! I really did forget to ask after the good old priest at home? But all this is dead earnest with me,—it shows what's expected, what's necessary, in fact,—when no sooner is the *likelihood* heard of, which you've just guessed, as to one's obtaining an appointment of this important kind—than every worthy man comes poking the fruit of his meditations upon you. True it is, though—desperately true, my dear fellow—that one or two more victories like Keppel and Palliser's will be the ruin of Old England. Even honest John Byron, I very much fear, can't do much to mend the matter!"

"The morning breeze shifts in our favour already, I think," returned Herbert, anxiously looking out. "This, with the barometer settled as it is, and the afternoon freshening the wind, surely secures the Admiral a good weather-gage?"

"Which he has been manœuvring for days to get, just when the Count might have been best

allowed to *keep it*—with a force for some time only equal, if not at first actually inferior to ours. Of course the French don't want the weather-gage even now, as it's not their cue to fight—and what will the Admiral do with it, without half-a-dozen of his ships sufficiently fast to bear down in time and break the enemy's line—as it seems Clerk wishes, and as we *all* wish! Clerk's first edition is nearly ready, I'm told, and a very good, clear, mathematical epitome of naval history, I hear, it so far is. The devil of the thing remains, though—namely, if French metal can't be hammered in the air, just to tell how to get our anvil behind it! Depend on't, no landsman has hit on *that* yet, else we'd have heard of the hint,—nor ever will. Nobody ever will, on theory—nothing but experimental knowledge, most likely on some mere chance. This old-fashioned 'weather-gage' rule of ours, perhaps——" Sir Charles's conjectural ingenuities had borne his mind away to future fleets, when Sir Richard Herbert once more drew his attention to that in hand.

"The rear-ship is now well on our lee-bow, Sir Charles, and 'edging a-head,'" said the latter, opening the door to the quarter-deck, where Mr. Holmes stood near the wheel; to direct which, the Captain's expected sign was now sufficient.

"That pitiable *Buffalo!* rabbit her—the very sight drives every other idea from one's head!"

broke out this future counsellor of the victor in the most notable of sea-battles; for whom the hated forty-four on-two-decks, nevertheless, appeared to have a curious fascination, as of whole crowds of represented error. "You can tell by her shape, how the main-deck gunners will stifle with the smoke from her lower-deck ports—no room to work the paltry popguns, either—but I must go, I see! If she loses her masts and drifts athwart you, Herbert, luff and pass her—no part of the fleet can follow to help you, mind,—the Admiral will scarce even recollect her!"

"We carry some heavy metal, however—thanks to yourself," said Captain Herbert, more gravely; "heavier, perhaps, than some of the hostile line. The *Astræa* offers comparatively small bulk, too. Then, if the two fleets only *pass* each other, as is to be feared, on opposite tacks,—why, so far as the frigate is concerned, being almost out of range at the last——"

"Butchery—mere butchery, by G—!" muttered Sir Charles Douglas in husky tones, as he quickly grasped the hand of his friend, and hurried to the gangway for his boat. "What's more, it's to no purpose. To fight in that way is a sin, Herbert, a hanged sin! We've far too little stratagem about us hitherto, curse it! Aim high, however, as *they* do, and perhaps you may knock off a wing of the Count, the nearer his centre the better—keep both

broadsides ready, *they* generally lumber-up one of theirs. Good-bye, good morning!—look out for anything special, and don't forget the *Bedfordshire* to-morrow at five. I shall probably be let off home with her, soon after."

As the energetic signal-captain was rowed towards his own busy ship, already impatient to run once more abreast of the Vice-admiral in the centre, the *Astræa* sheered aside and glided to her appointed place in the rear of all. Until she fairly took up this place—meanwhile even contracting her reduced spread of sail to what would keep her there—Captain Herbert stood with his first-lieutenant, cordially sanctioning the few alterations, lightly doing away with a certain tendency to increased deference or exaggerated punctilio on Mr. Holmes's part, and altogether joining in his remarks on the circumstances in such a manner as to dissipate a cloud on the brow of that careful officer, when he inwardly speculated on the probable danger to his lofty masts, well-squared yards, and most-cherished canvas. In imposing succession before them, the "red" squadron closed to the stately range of the "blue" division; whose sternmost ship, the Vice-admiral's own three-decker, had suddenly luffed out of her rearward station and shot along under sail to the van, accompanied to leeward by the *Bedfordshire* frigate; thus proving good old Byron's characteristic survey of the whole, no less than his suitable resolution to bear the first brunt in person.

In far-stretched perspective, full half a league of embattled line, the fleet hauled close to the wind with one accord, steering for a single point now settled in the south; the gathered troop-ships, in convoy behind, streamed up to make for it safely from the windward; on either bow, the two out-looking cruisers heaved under running sail, the buoyant signal-frigate rose and fell conspicuous off the weather-beam. While glancing swift away in front of all to leeward, or beating back against the swell, was seen the nimble *Lively* cutter, for ever with new signals hoisted—flag over ball, ball over flag, wheft or pendant varying them like a yacht at a regatta; her great spanking white mainsail now dipped in the blue like an albatross's wing, and now her sharp jibs were thrown up with a spray in their shadow, blown across to the new yellow patch in their nearest edge. High rose the mighty tropical sun; close at hand the very shade of the sails on the water eddied out; the scarlet flag of the nearest Rear-admiral swam aloft from the golden quivering royal-mast like a fiery serpent's tongue, over the pinnacled maze and mesh of tented war that bore along. To all behind the eager Admiral, it was then but an aimless vision, which well might leave men's private matters their breathing-space till its purport came. Naval warfare has this speciality of its own: the *Astræa* above all was marked by it, for to her the occasion had come unexpected, and, still more, the West India letter-bag from home

had thus reached her beforehand. She could keep her place easily then; and though the letter-bag was never bulky in those days, still the very forecastle had its small share of correspondence, there were warrant-officers who had distant friends, the midship-berth and gun-room were not by any means forgotten at home, and even the First-lieutenant this time had a domestic packet to look over in his state-room below. An old newspaper or two was all that some had got, and what was left of these could keep a little; then some had none whatever, so the charge of the deck and watch was not too hard for them. The Captain himself passed in for a few minutes to the altered poop-cabin—stripped, dismantled, and thrown into one open space as it already was, with its four carronades cast loose, the steward and his boy bustling things away from view—nothing almost wanting to the change, but guns'-crews and marines.

Flooded with light it was; up through the stern-ports, from the unobstructed expanse, the swell sent in its rolling flicker to the beams and sky-light overhead. The desk and papers still lay scrupulously untouched, however, with a couple of spare flags stretched like a curtain near—which, with their emblazoned quarterings and heraldic lions, the snowy field and ruddy cross, too, of St. George's ensign, might well have brought to mind the tarnished splendours of that old dining-room at

Herbert Court; where the bare spring-sunshine had flooded in between the old divided tapestry of antique strife, one day—the day of the hunt and of Lord Beaufoy—when the old housekeeper, Mrs. Brinds, showed it to the young heiress from Wrixworth as she sat by the old-fashioned table-cover where the silver salver lay. With all its vividness, its dusty brightness, its quick promise of full summer—with its glow, its rising passion, its suppressed transport—Herbert remembered it well. Never had he forgotten it; he had indeed desired to do so, and resolutely made his endeavours to that end. For she was of a family too prosperous and too full of the consciousness of wealth; herself too evident a child of fortune, too sunny, too fair, too young. The strong effort had doubtless brought its own satisfaction; it had perhaps helped him to decide against other temptations, forcing his adherence to the honour of the Service, when social casuistry might have excused a step now legally open; a step which would be the mere expression of a just political right, always tacitly implied by the Abbé Horne's silence on the matter—so jesuitical, yet so unworldly. Thus had he fortified himself, also, by taking charge of young Spencer, her brother; instead of then feeling any self-suspicion that this trust had been caught at like a precious relic—that it would constantly keep up her image, bring back her tones, actually sometimes revive the

turn of her features, and trouble him with disgraceful struggles to be the *Astræa's* captain only, not too kind, not too anxious, not too stern—nay, that it might scare him at fancies of Mr. Holmes's over-shrewdness, and again surprise him in the very innermost state-room of his supreme command. Since the truth was, that though latterly he had seen promise of the best kind in Henry, and found relief in purposely transferring much of these feelings to him—yet at times even of peril, when repose should have been snatched or charts consulted, the same charge had started uppermost, and convicted him of his folly. Out of this rash charge, what wild hopes, what abject derelictions of duty had often come up! as he had idly sat there and heard the long liquid whisper of the eddy under the counter, the watery yearnings and bubblings below all; till the tiller-ropes creaked again, keeping the noble frigate to her appointed track. And now—now—it was not duty, it was not danger nor the obligations involved, not the hard but unavoidable surrender of what the law and the lawyers offered—which, for a little, bent Sir Richard Herbert down there in his screened place, moveless, aimless, heedless of the important missives, gazing and regazing on the good Abbé's desultory letter.

"To Etherege — to my cousin Etienne — in spring!" he hoarsely repeated, still searching over for more words, where the well-filled sheet was

spread glaring on the desk between his hands. "*What* spring?" he asked: bewildered more within himself, than even by the good chaplain's mode of statement. Though, in its main tenor, of course, the epistle dwelt on the great theme of old Sir Ralph's decease, his most commendable will and testament, with its pregnant benefits to Herbert Court. The past glories of that time-honoured mansion were to be eclipsed, its burdened demesnes to be set free and made prolific once more; the long-suppressed wishes of poor Rogers, the land-bailiff, were now being already attended to, about improving the people's cottages—the many reasonable needs of worthy Mrs. Brinds, the housekeeper, after consultation with that deserving woman, had been so far acted upon: measures all justified by the Abbé's confidence in the purposes and the approval of his former pupil and ever-dear "son."

"What spring—is it past? No—this was harvest-time," murmured Sir Richard. "It is November now—he means the coming year. And yet, might it not have been *otherwise*—had I but spoken out! If I had written—if I had even ventured on a sentence through her brother, some message of a word or two—such as he, perhaps, would willingly—— No. *No!* But my cousin—this Etienne Etherege —Mr. de St. Amand, as it seems! I did not even imagine that he knew them! How—how has such opportunity been afforded *him?* Has it been for-

tune? Was it, then, already so clear to every one that my uncle's property—save this trifle he leaves free—would pass over from me of my own act!"

"For twenty years," wrote the Abbé Horne, "almost nothing has been added to the library, which is not merely thus grown obsolete as to what passes in modern science, but remains very poor in the works of the earlier Greek Fathers, now well edited at Oxford and in Germany. The crucifix in the oratory, also, has long needed re-gilding—nor need I speak of what you, Richard, were the first to wish, *videlicet*, that a decent, if not decorous altar-cloth should appear in the chapel (in default of what was once the happier and more sacred way, when such furniture employed the sedulous fingers of noble religious ladies, and of piously-disposed maidens of gentle nurture, with their well-born attendants)."

"It was stated somewhere," muttered Herbert, running an eager but hurried eye over the pages, "that she once came again, to see the gardens, with an elder sister—that she told him she never saw a place she loved to look at, like Herbert Court! Surely I read the words—or do I dream *yet?*"

"I could have no hesitation, in this view," wrote elsewhere the studious chaplain, "with regard to the expense of a good electric battery and new voltaic pile, so apposite to the above experiments—which in other circumstances might have been inde-

finitely retarded. The galvanic wire would be of course cast in the body of the cannon—it could not thus be spiked by an enemy's superior force—then my further hypothesis points to a missile for the piece, so terrible in its nature as to bring about ere long, in all probability, an absolute revolution in naval warfare—possibly to extinguish all warfare whatsoever; the true result and certain goal of Science, whereby every such speculation is justified." But again recurring casually to the point of that anguish he had inflicted, came a fresh allusion to the last party from Wrixworth Hall, whose visit to the house had broken the outset of his letter. The Abbé had not hastened to join them; it was just before their departure that he had first seen Etienne Etherege, who was of the party, and found that his own favoured Mademoiselle Kate (detained that day by no graver ailment than a headache, most natural on so hot an August afternoon) was *not* present. Afterwards, only, from Mrs. Brinds, had he learnt the fact of a settled arrangement of marriage between those two—delayed till spring; partly so because another daughter of Mr. Spencer's was then to enter the like sacred state, partly for other reasons unknown; though Mrs. Brinds had gone the length of adding, that the young lady's early years might less signify than her humoured will. "Her elder sister," remarked the Abbé, "the same who once previously accompanied herself, as I before said (recalling your own for-

mer acquaintance with her),—is certainly far from the *espièglerie*, mingled with sweetness, of *ma petite mignonne, Mademoiselle Katharina* — who always pleased me, but whom some now speak of as capricious and proud. Nevertheless, Miss Mary is not merely comely, but amiable—of her own accord she proposed to embroider a hassock for the little Oratory (although herself about to be united, in spring, to the incumbent of the Protestant benefice here, a pluralist as well as a widower—with whom I pray that content may be found, if happiness may scarce be counted on here below!). Much may happen, too, before spring—when you, Richard, will be here. Let me repeat—the *six months* are sufficient, but they do not allow of delay, considering the frequent vicissitudes of maritime journeying."

"With regard to your cousin Etherege," concluded the letter, "he is all that you yourself described, as to attractiveness of feature or form, also as to the ingratiating manner, the candour of air and tone—perhaps as to the generosity and warmth of disposition. For the ingenuous character—well, I am an old *habitué*, you know, of Versailles, and of the College of our order, at St. Omer. That likeness to the portrait of Sir Thomas Shadd, your Machiavellian ancestor—which is now undoubted both to myself and Mrs. Brinds since we saw the young man—does not excite the most agreeable prepossessions. By the way, it was my young

friend, your *cadet de vaisseau*, Master Spencer, who first pointed this out—pray, once more remember me to the young gentleman."

"Enough of this till we meet. Before then (as I am informed by a note from himself), Father Joseph, the late Sir Ralph's chaplain, will have visited here for conference on all matters. I do not see how you can return to sea in a professional capacity, but this need not obstruct pursuits of a kindred nature. I fear the removal of your pious and faithful uncle from this earthly scene has seemed too little to affect me, yet believe me, I feel it—it was an event having its place in a boundless Divine scheme. Perpetual masses are now permitted by law, happily, for his soul—as well in St. Peter's at York, where he lies, as in the chapel of the holy St. Ralph the Martyr, in the Cathedral of our blessed Lady at Paris. Let us pray for its peace!"

Herbert was again calm by that time, firmly setting his eye on each passage he had sought. "Yes —*his* personal advantages were unquestionable," he said. "And what right—what claim is there *here*, to set against them! Ungenerous—foolish! if I entertained this base, this vile change of feeling towards him—my kinsman—the grandson of my father's youngest and best-loved brother, whose fidelity to his exiled sovereign and proscribed religion separated him from us. Yesterday, our com-

mon blood warmed me towards him, and now—is it for his youth, for his fortune—either that which his grandfather earned so hardly, or my late uncle's, which I fancied myself giving up so freely, or—or——Even in *this*, can I not conceive myself in the place of my cousin — half-cousin, rather, let it be so! Can I not, I say——No—no—madness lies that way," he groaned. Dropping his head to the table, he crushed mechanically in his hand a folded document he had taken out of his desk. "Madness, they say, has been in our house before. A precious offering, truly, to have brought home for *her!*" He looked round the bare and altered place that had been a cabin with its berths, now day-lit and ventilated to its most sheltered nook, like some merchantman's round-house; the crumpled paper in his grasp—for whose destruction there had been nothing but that instinctive act—drew back his notice from this staring consciousness, and he smoothed it out, unfolded it, read it over carefully. It was a formal Will, legally drawn out before the frigate had sailed from Spithead the previous year, wanting but the dates, signature, and attestations. It was in favour of the very man he had spoken of, his grand-cousin, Etienne Etherege; he took a pen and rapidly added to it a codicil; it needed further but to call his steward when passing, and to request Mr. Holmes's presence for a moment when he returned on deck.

"Were anything to happen to me now, or before long," he told himself, "this is at all events best—the Abbé and others are thus more secure—the place itself is nothing, but it will be sure of revival and care. 'Tis but just—his own natural claim will be open to no dispute—then, if they live much there, as might be likely from that remark of—of hers, the gardens will bloom. They will bloom—aye. Strange! *Why* did she give it to me?" It was the pale withered bud and mossy sprig from a rare white rose-tree at Wrixworth Hall, which Kate had unhesitatingly broken off—one day of the election-canvass, before she visited the house or met the Abbé Horne; giving it at the mention of his floricultural tastes—that he might send back, if it were worth while, for a slip from the root. A sudden rosier blush had then risen upon the smile of her speech; his eye had a moment looked for the first time to hers, and she had turned aside—but afterwards, laughing at his careful charge of the trust, had herself gaily showed him where to keep it safest for the Abbé—to wit, where election-favours, knightly-orders, even flowers by deputy from ladies, should of course be carried. Ever since that evening, treasured in the most secret drawer of his desk, though over and over again looked at, it had lain wrapped from the sea-air, tied together with a shred of plaited ribbon —a pink, faint perfumed shred from her glove or from her hair—which had fallen out of her hand-

kerchief in the room at Herbert Court, the day of their parting. He put it now away in the safest, closest receptacle he had—next his heart, beating all the steadier for such preparations. By a mere turn of the head he could now see that the breeze, as he felt it, still freshened—that the fleet was wafted faster southward athwart it—and that soon, with full sight of the enemy from deck, a decisive movement must ensue. Again he wrote, indeed—the beginning of an explanatory letter to the Abbé, whose utter and obstinate ignorance smote on him still like a fault of his own, as to the uselessness of Sir Ralph's bequest. But the usual stir on deck before noon was hardly perceptible, the master with his sextant and quadrants had scarce come up, Mr. Holmes himself had not stepped out of the after-hatchway, when the Captain appeared from below the poop.

High aloft over all, in front, had meanwhile sat Harry Spencer with a letter too—which the Captain had sent out to him at breakfast-time; when the ship's mail-bag had been opened already by the clerk and purser's steward, showing none for him there. Specially consigned to the Captain's care, addressed in those clear and delicate characters of a sister's hand, it had thus left its needless sting behind it. The whole, as before, was Mary's writing—the contents absurdly expansive upon minor topics, on major ones provokingly condensed and tantalising,

full of good advice and prudent maxims, with unaccountable marks of emphasis, and a very trifling enclosure indeed (considering the expenses of a midshipman in the West Indies, and the rate of charges at Kingston). Of course, Jane was from home; their "dear mother" had a thousand messages as to his wardrobe and wishes about his comfort, whose substance strangely blended with Mary's own epistolary style; for it was well understood that Mrs. Spencer seldom wrote,—only considering each letter to be *hers*, and seizing first, by prescriptive right, upon the answers. Their "honoured father's" more pressing engagements had obliged him, as usual, to content himself by a hurried expression of trust in Henry's welfare, along with the bank-note he had left on the table; for the counting-house engrossed his time as much as ever. The eldest brother Goscroft, fresh in his degree from Oxford, tendered here a most gracious inquiry as to the health of the youngest. As to Kitty, she again sent her best love, her regrets at the omission to write, her renewed promise, more solemn than before, to do so soon; but it was really unaccountable how the headaches and the fatigues of Kate had grown upon her, coinciding so oddly with the date for West India packets: though Mary said not a word to imply that she was ill, rather the contrary. And, to Harry's extreme amazement, almost to

his disgust—Mr. Etherege, the Count, who seemed either to have stuck at Bristol or to hover between London and that city, had chanced to visit Beech Grove the evening previous — the *Count* had absolutely desired his kind remembrances to him, nay, added a polite request that he would convey his (the Count's) loving duty and excuses, as a relative, to Captain Herbert himself; whom he trusted shortly to address in due form, if not ere long to congratulate in person. The surprise well-nigh exceeded the repugnance, however; since it was in this connexion that the youth first made out the fact of old Sir Ralph's death, and of the title thus devolved on his own noble patron, as Sir Richard.

Up on the fore-topmast cross-trees, perched above the look-out men, he had found his post not merely suitable to the impatience of the crisis, but to the privacy required by these matters. Distinctly visible then, right under the sun to southward, was the serrying glare of the hostile force, as they crowded sail to draw out from the lee of the high land of Granada, now apparent over the haze in their clustered rear. Partly becalmed under that island—whose capture it seemed he had at last effected,—Count D'Estaing's delay became intelligible to the simplest view: equally so the triumphant fact, that the afternoon breeze thus placed him at a disadvantage in the general action he

could no longer refuse. The weather-gage passed more plainly every minute to the side of the British fleet, as the breeze shifted still more in their favour; confidence spread backward to their farthest rear, not of decisive victory alone, but of the ensuing recovery of Granada, lost so shamefully. That the *Cornucopia* had run in there, was obvious now; to look for her at present was useless, —yet with the crowning disgrace which she had carried off behind into St. George's Bay, where the Union-jack so long had waved, there were thousands of hardy cheeks burning besides Harry's. Luckily she was safe enough there; long before this letter need be answered, and without hurt to the name of the firm, she would be all right again. It was too much to anticipate, certainly, that the infernal Dodge himself would be secured in the trap where he had at length put his foot—still it is undeniable that Harry Spencer looked rather too much on the coming business, as yet, in the unpleasant light of a contest on behalf of Broadby and Co. Down below, in the cockpit berth, the letters were this time so few, as, in the recent harmonious state of things there, to be more than ever welcomed by way of common property: there had been one for young Cobbinshaw, which, owing to the rightful owner's unlucky abduction with the *Cornucopia*, the Purser retained; Coventry had one also, but it proved to be a mere friendly note

from his tailor, with his "amount of account rendered;" Spencer's tidings being still unknown, all interest was concentred on that which Little Blakely once again received. And so the poor little fellow had scarce glanced it over, ere more than half the mess were bothering him to read it "loud-out"—missing, only, whatever might be too private. Seated in state upon the cockpit table (already cleared for the surgeon's use), Harry had thus last seen him since breakfast—reading aloud in a small, plaintive, schoolboy voice, amidst deep attention and gracious patronage, only broken by occasional requests to "speak up," with a rough hint or two for any junior in the doorway who might laugh. To be sure, Maclean the surgeon's mate could not sneer, being off in the *Cornucopia;* neither was it likely that Mr. Burt, if he had had time to spare, would now force him to read out the whole, as he used — for Burt had altered wonderfully with busier times. In fact, in Blakely's letter there was so much close-writing and crossing that he had excuses to stumble over great part; and then, for that matter, everybody was pleased with the mere names of his innumerable relations, and the immense deal of particulars about them, only to be explained by Little Blakely, if he chose, at his leisure.

Postscripts, on the other hand, were Mary's strong point, so that her correspondence might at another time have stood this ordeal safely; what-

ever was of most consequence, she always recollected afterwards, and, if there was room left, stuck it in a postscript—if not, crossed it over the rest, even over that again. The worst of it was, she seemed to recollect things at the oddest times; nor was it always plain at what corner to hunt up one end of her news. "In spite of many commercial difficulties in town," she said in one place, "Bristol appears prosperous, and papa consequently;" but at another, "There is much Alarm of the dangerous pirate Jones, who, 'tis reported, after *escaping* from our navy at hand, has gone towards the West Indies, but this I know not if papa credits, *still* there is anxiety, and the Underwriters at that capricious *Lloyd's* have declared, it seems——"

What it was that seemed—or whether the *Cornucopia's* loss, if ultimate, would be severe—it was impossible to discover then. A signal flew from the *Bedfordshire*, far a-head, and was promptly responded to, all along, by increased sail in the whole line according to its several need. "Set the fore-topgallant-sail," spoke the deep voice of Sir Richard Herbert below; and as a lieutenant hailed the "top," the single sail was loosed and rose high over Harry's head. When all the line-of-battle thus quickened through the water, while the glorious frigate impatiently buoyed herself on it, making a quick smart plash against her copper ere she sank and sliced sharply through,—he looked more eagerly than ever into the distance.

There was a spy-glass slung over the shoulder of the chief look-out-man, some few feet below—the watchful seaman who leant silently over the top-sail-yard, with the glare now half screened off his brawny back, his feet thrust arrow-like against the curve of the foot-rope, and his long thick pigtail-queue dependent from under his wide-brimmed tarpaulin hat, that fluttered its blue streamer out: he might have been thought noting his reflections there, as now and then mechanically he touched the bellied canvas beneath him with one hand, and the shadow of his arm was thrown on the uppermost row of reef-points—where, like notes of music, like tags that fringe the gently-swelling bodice of a woman, they quivered up to sight.

"The glass, sir?" said a rough but well-known voice. "Ay, ay, Mr. Spencer. They're a-doing their endeavours, though, sir, to give us a near view ere long. Can't very well do no otherwise with this here breeze, as I takes it!"

"Oh, it's you, Jackson," the young gentleman somewhat awkwardly responded, as the telescope was reached up by a hairy arm, corded with sinewy fibres, tattooed with hieroglyphics both professional and tenderly sentimental. The honest blue eye of the captain of the foretop had denoted an amount of ready serviceableness, as well as a quick concern about the possible home-news, which was none the more welcome for his recent presence

on the odious scene of last night's misfortune; besides, from among the men in the round-top below, the too-obvious visage of dark Dick appeared to have been polished by that occasion to a yet more gleaming jet. "Well, all the worse for *them*, I hope, my man," added the youth, loftily. He put his letter up, and drew the joints of the spy-glass out. "The nearest of 'em loom large enough —but we've some heavy ones ourselves. 'Pincher' throws a pretty biggish shot, too, Bob—will he and the rest of 'em get their share of the work before night, think you?"

Jackson had turned his bronzed face steadily away again, shading his eyes to see; he shook his head rather gravely in reply. "They're carronades, sir, you'll mind," said he. "Carronade-range be near work for a frigate, heavy though she is, to run the gauntlet of a liner—much less, above a score on 'em! I've been general-engaged ere now, but it's the first time *this* style! Hows'ever, we're al'ays larnin'—there's a signal, sir. Ay—make sail again it is."

"Maintop, there!" called a lieutenant, "loose main-to'-gallants'l!—Sheet home—hoist away the yard!" ran the word on deck. And still behind Harry's place rose higher the welcome screen, that wafted alternate shade and light about him, with yellow canvas-glow between, as he hastened to be done with Mary's postscripts. These still bore

communications worth deciphering; here were her sole bashful allusions to the rector's wish for an early day in spring, as the conclusion to their rather long engagement: and even while the *Astræa's* motion quickened visibly, with the clearing order of her whole long deck shown narrow to his view, Henry Spencer forgot it all for a little—almost forgot the very events so closely impending—through startled indignation at the drift of Mr. Etherege's strange intimacy, at the suit he had never before heard of in regard to his sister Kate, above all at the seeming issue to which Mary so coolly referred, with a view to the same day in spring. He could have jumped off the cross-trees, he could have run down the rigging, he could fain have appealed to Sir Richard himself, and have tried to hurry the frigate from the company of those slow old castles she was bound-up with—pressed as he was by more alarming presentiments than ever, in regard to the effect of the *Cornucopia's* final loss on all concerned.

"In regard to the similar near prospects of our poor *dear* Kitty," wrote Mary Spencer; "which are no doubt in a sense *dazzling* and, by some, thought a match quite level with what even county families might aspire to—I'm sure I know not whether to feel as is due, or now to think a little delay more fitting her *strange* turn of conduct, than this precipitation on her own part can be? 'Tis true papa (with the utmost *care* to avoid the least show of

an inclination that way, and indeed thus the more endear'd to *all* when we *consider* the now pressing motives to such a *Parent*) had early favour'd the gentleman's addresses. He himself was and is moreover vastly agreeable and well-bred (and as to person, 'tis unquestionable but still) all along there was no *making* her out. So much *so*, as at that to anger *even* my mother, causing *me* to be, to a degree, sorry for him—(one while gay, almost encouraging, another indifferent to *chillness*, again next day, as if to *try* her power, ranging between the fashionable coquette at large and a more particular listlessness in the *one* direction, such as must have repelled most)—save for a volatility in respect to aught like wit or brilliant conversation, which of late has been most astonishingly drawn forth in Kate by her so much taking-out in Mrs. Beauchamp's circle. Lady Die, even, affects her presence—and *then* Mr. E., you know, shines above description! and I think it *certain* that one day at Mrs. Beauchamp's he had *then* absolutely made Kate an offer and *been* refus'd—tho' her lips even to *me* have been on that and some other points *quite clos'd.*

"Since this, however, dearest Harry," concluded she, right across the same cramped space—into part of which the sealing-wax had run, in the tropics,—"such has been the *increase* of anxiety from our loved Papa's state of health, nay evident . . . manner produc'd undoubtedly by too great a flow of

business with late hours at the counting-house, still unaided since that man . . . the *effect* of whose desertion he conceals, that my mother insisted on his taking steps to . . . . I don't say that the change in Catherine is in any degree owing to that idea, altho' you well know how fond a parent he has *ever* shown himself tow'rd her—and 'tis undoubted that Etherege (however undetermined hitherto for commercial pursuits) is of a bent and connexion, with parts uncommonly able, to improve his own large fortune in this mode. This fortune is doubtless of little consideration *here*, nevertheless 'tis like shortly to be much increased, and will be something *prodigious* but with his liberality of nature well plac'd. He leaves soon for town, tho' even *there* it seems his active and ardent disposition can scarce look on so *short* an interval with patience! and has already (unknown to *her*) seen desirable *patterns* at Perry and Price's the *jewellers* in Brandon-street—Which my mother and I must as soon as suits us go approve or *otherwise*, but of course in strict confidence. 'Tis understood that after the event, he becomes a *partner* in the House —tho' 'twere to be wished that *this* took earlier place. Your brother Goscroft assists papa frequently since his return, yet his taste appears not, nor his *great* ability, mercantile, and O Henry if in the mean while from these cares—or owing to any stroke of fortune at *present*—our dear honoured father's health should give way!

"To see your sister Catherine at this *moment* you would really excuse *her* doing more than send messages—sitting against the window I must say as if her head ach'd over a book like a piece of *marble*, yet at the same time as chill, and, for aught that can be told of her, quite as disdainful! Recollect your *single* letter had nothing for her but a jesting retort,—and yet none searches the *newspaper* more than she lest you should have met the rebel fleet, or has listen'd to the wind in the rumbling *chimneys* so scar'd. *Even* my mother has then look'd up and reminded her, quite calmly, that your ship is *stationed* within the tropics where it is always summer (tho' the thunder and lightning, I fear, must be *dreadful* at times), and as to the rebels, they have *no fleet* (according to papa, and with regard to the French or Spaniards, *their* fleets can signify nothing to the matter, since the *Astræa* is but a frigate?). Yet it was but a day or two since (Mr. E. here,) when she was *outside* on the lawn, all spirits with your uncle Duttridge, who had just come in from Wrixworth. After setting Goscroft and *Fido* to romp together like Socrates himself—there was something, by-the-by, my uncle *innocently jok'd* to her about living yet in Herbert Court some day, (to which it appears Mr. E. would be heir-at-law, were aught befalling his half-cousin your present Captain, which God forbid!). In a moment her face flam'd out like *fire*, and she almost threw *off* her uncle's arm as she *gaz'd* askance to demand his

meaning, to his manifest amaze—but he *happily drew* her off from view. Uncle Charles did not stay so long as to talk with *me*, and besides, is generally chary of *her* matters. *Can it be possible*, Henry, that there was ever aught *between* Sir Richard (your captain) and *Kate!* In your very first, pray let *me* know of any guess, even, to this effect—but, for Heaven's sake, breathe it not elsewhere! Write soon —you'd better enclose all, perhaps, to *me*. And so I must *again* close finally from your affte. sister, M. S."

"*By* George! *Ah?* The Count!!! And so '*if aught befals your present captain*,' forsooth! *they* would get Herbert Court! Oho, Miss Moll—but this *is* cool—*cool*, considering how things look!" Such was the incoherent commentary which the midshipman had sent skimming along the surface of these tidings, till his very astonishment dropped thus down the sudden depths of their last wild demand. "'Ever *aught* between Sir Richard, my captain, and—and—Kate!' *Kitty!*—Whew!" And having thus ejaculated, with the other hand emphatically slapped down, Harry sat staring at the words, instead of forward past the fore-topgallant-sail at the much more urgent spectacle in the sky.

CHAPTER X.

BATTLE.

"LEE fore-topsail-yard!" was hailed from the mustering deck, as the midshipman gave up every thought of home affairs for the time. "How many strange sail in sight *now*? Count the Line only—never mind frigates; how do they steer?"

"Ay, ay, sir," Jackson answered—"five-and-twenty sail, all told. The very last of 'em's hull-up now, sir—steering easy, for our *wake*—no higher. If you're done with that 'ere glass, Mr. Spencer," said he, quietly, "I'd thank 'ee."

Harry lowered himself down along with it; and as the screen of the upper sail passed from against the rousing sight, an excitement beyond expression drew him out on the yard to Jackson's side. "For our *wake*, Jackson?" echoed he, in a whisper; for the mustering stillness again renewed below, and throughout the towered perspective of ships in front, was oppressive.

"Yes, they look as if it were so," added the lad; after trying to make them out, with a rather shaky hand. "Here's the glass; see if you're right, for somehow—I haven't just got my focus!—Then, in *that* case, I suppose, Bob, my lad, they're shying the thing, after all?"

"As to that, I carn't speak," said Jackson; "they're steerin' *like* it, anyhow. And if so be they've been an' fortyfived this here isle o' Grenadia to their taste, ye know, sir—why, after that, it's hard to see what reason they've got for to do otherwise than be off?"

"Ay, and most likely we'll have trouble enough to take it back," was the youth's fretful, though brisk, reply. "The forts 'll have to be battered awhile, I fancy, old Ship?"

"It's like—it's like, sir," agreed Jackson, with marked brevity. "If a man might make so bold," added he, in a tone equally marked by uncommon kindliness, "it's to be hoped, Mr. Spencer, you an't heer'd no worse news, sir, regardin' that there Indyman; it's all right about her, we hopes—that's to say, the whole mess; for Dark Dick, there, he——"

"Oh, of course; no, nothing more, my prime Salt!" Henry responded. "Nothing worse, certainly. *You've* seen no signs of her? No—I didn't expect you would—but I know the *villain's* ways well enough already. However, she's *safe*—and she'll be still safer, I hope, by the time I write

home again, (if not—if *not?*" thought he, painfully, —"well, Mary may prose about cares and strokes of fortune, but she little thinks the *Cornucopia* at this moment——"). A heavy challenging gun to windward, from the British vice-admiral's flag-ship in the van, broke through all such thoughts, so trivial by comparison. And as the simultaneous vapour, like a glove hurled out, unrolled itself far a-head in the hot sunlight, hanging for a moment all grey, and dun, and ghastly violet, ere it scattered back through the admiral's sails,—the grim conviction sank on Harry Spencer's mind, which he had as yet but tried to evade.

"Lord love ye! they don't mind *that* no more nor a schoolboy's pop-quill!" exclaimed the indignant "A. B.," eyeing the French line through his glass. "They's bound som'eres or other, right due west by sow'-west—som'eres as we've nought ado with, you'd think, steerin' south-east half-east. It's got to be their reg'lar style now-a-days, it seems, by what the *Bedfordshire's* boat's-crew was a-sayin' this morning. The Mounseers doesn't care for the Weather-gage, this war; they'd rather want it; they doesn't so much as know we're here, you'd say! Take a near look, though, Mr. Spencer; they're in fine trim. How they walks, too, all close on-end, with every one the same sail spread! You'll see the headmost *flower-de-lilies* now, sir, off their taffrail-staffs; splendid bits o' bunting, they *is*—all white and gowld!"

"Thank you, Jackson, it don't much matter," said Henry; "I do better without it. They seem all very heavy ships, Jackson, don't they? And I can see *two* three-deckers already."

"Only *eighties*, sir; they're leading, and there's no more of em!" was the would-be cheerful answer. "It's owned to be a bad class, is them three-decked eighties. They tumbles home terrible in the upper-decks, and can't be long fought without the very burning wads droppin' through the lower ports. Howsomedever, with twelve seventy-fours, an' eleven third-rates besides, why——"

"Yes, yes, against nineteen! It can't be; it's a shame—it's not fair; I don't understand it! For I *won't count* the *Astræa*," broke out Harry, with a gulp in his throat, that had hitherto been hard to keep down. "She's but a frigate. Nor that ugly old tub next a-head—look at her, Bob; she's only a forty-four too, you know; and there's her deck about a third less length than our own! No, the French couldn't get any name by it; and as they don't mean it, of course, and as *we've* the wind of them at our choice——"

"Hush, sir! the bo'sun's got his eye aloft," muttered the honest fore-topman. "Ay, we've the wind on 'em, no fear, Mr. Spencer,—to force matters on. And *that's* worth a couple more heavy ships to we, if it was but only a thought stronger. I'd give a year's pay this moment for half a breeze.

What skears me, like, a little—is the cool way they're leavin' us the weather-gage; it's onnat'ral, blow me! 'Twas in the glorious Admiral Hawke's time, d'ye see, sir, I smelt powder first; I was a youngster too, and took it queerish myself notwithstanding, Mr. Spencer. But keep a firm hold o' the yard, sir——"

"All right; no danger now. I can see cool enough; the nearest of them have just opened their ports," returned the boy. "They're trimming sail a little, I think, ain't they,—to break up a point nearer, and pass us on opposite tacks. 'Twas only a sort of a qualmishness, Bob, as if the swell of the water disagreed with one again! It's the slowness—when 'll the drums begin to beat?"

"You'll see the signal, sir," said Jackson. "Bless ye, young gemman, if *this* had been the style in my time, I'd 'a been too sick of it to carry cartridges. But, d'ye see, 'twas a good Biscay breeze blowing, all spray to the cat-heads, and a fair toss-up 'twixt the French and Sir Edward who'd have the good of it; and the French, they lost. So, working away *that* fashion, who's got time to look a-head? 'Twould ha' done your heart good to see how Hawke went in with it, right and left, and let us smash them! No matter what odds, Spaniards and all—he al'ays did it, an' every time fresh. 'Cause why? 'twan't only that we'd got the weather, but we'd got—why, well, we'd got

Sir Edward Hawke! Admiral Byron's as good a seaman as ever stepped, Mr. Spencer; no fear—no fear, sir; there's the breeze freshening a bit; a quarter of an hour 'll do. By the looks of things a-board that weathermost Frenchman, I'd say they're beat to quarters already."

"Jackson, did anything strange come over you at the first smell you spoke of?" asked Harry, anxiously—"or at the sound, or something? is it true you lose your senses, and see red, or can't go the way you would?"

"Not as I knows on; it's accordin' to how it's took. No, sir, you gets cooler than ever after the first shot, I mind. Only you goes at it like mischief to hear o' the first French ship striking her colours!" So Jackson said; and as a lieutenant passed below to the forecastle, he levelled his glass in silence at the coming foe. The lifted van of the French fleet, still miles away aslant from the decks of the British rear, grew from aloft completely palpable, even to the naked eye; beautiful and terrible it rose along, dilating imperceptibly in the hot afternoon, through intense light that quivered on it; one part glared metallic out, another floated in lustrous haze, with spired shape beyond shape of radiant successors. Wide still rolled athwart them the dark-blue ocean-floor, dazzling its great slow swells across to where the English flag-ship blocked it with topsails edged midway against the sky—two serried lines that

held their several way, each freely parting the liquid circle between them, and could scarce yet seem about to meet, so wide the angle to be enclosed in passing. Thrilled by this chance stood up the boy; without a wish, a fear, a hope,—borne out by thought beyond himself—he stood and held to the mast, and watched the gap of distant air; while slowly, slowly, drifted the vice-admiral's course upon it.

Silent, determined, grand to behold, did the *Princess Royal* lead into that sultry space; and it made one's heart jump to watch her pinnacled maze, her square spread of sail, her solid bulk chequered like a draught-board, and the snow-white coping of the hammock-cloth over the jet-black rampart all eager with blue dots—with a red crowd of her marines, and a poop that flashed full of epaulets, under the blowing colours which seemed shed upon the sunlight. But yet, the nearest French appeared scarce less grand to Harry. They, too, grew quickly solid and outspread—every one with a hull worth looking at, each with an easy glide along the swell, each lifting from it a gleam of bright copper, till the finest cordage showed distinct, and their very fulness of men was seen. No time to criticise then the narrow-headed cut of their topsails, and comparative lightness of their spars, or the great number of blocks aloft (a thing, doubtless, most absurd); to object to

their dark-sided hulls with red-lipped port-holes, their want of hammock-cloths, and their canvas of a yellow tinge. From sail to sail, indeed, the same hovering shades were cast as nearer hand,—the same floating tracts of brightness, that flickered hot here and there on some fresh patch, or on a whole new jib: till in their van became apparent, without a glass, the damasked gold of the *fleur-de-lis* on the milk-white banner of France, and the deeper hues of the flags on high, which their Admiral carried. You could see far in the glossy wash of the sea from beneath his bilge how the reflection eddied by, broken but sumptuous, over the burnishing flash of his copper. And, for a moment, steadying the glass again to bear that way, the close sight startled one—so suddenly did the busy throng, though mute, thicken to view. The ports with open guns run out; in some, the glow of clustered faces and half-stripped men; in *one*, through and through to the light that came in opposite, a sky-blue coat or two,—nay, over the bristling of arms above, young Spencer vowed to Jackson that he thought he caught a glimpse of Count D'Estaing himself, high on his poop beyond the rest, with a gold-laced hat held up in his hand politely or commandingly, his head powdered, a steel cuirass on, and booted to the knees.

"Very like, sir—very like; it's but a fashion they has; some o' them, that Sir Edward took,

had spurs as well," said Jackson, with his careful eye on their own signal-frigate. "They've hauled up closer again, though; it's *sure* now! I knowed well enough the French has been at quarters this half-hour past, and so there goes the orders for *ours*."

All at once the voice of Harry Spencer, in an altered tone, made the seaman turn his head. "Look there, Jackson!" said the midshipman, pointing down at the surface of the water two or three hundred feet away; where, seen perpendicularly from that height, the deep-coloured ocean was for fathoms so transparent under the full blaze of day, as to show any object in it by contrasted tint. Two little cross-striped pilot-fish had been swimming about near the surface, like creatures made of china; beneath them, hanging grass-green as if on a pivot, an enormous shark poised itself in the abyss; the white of his belly showed yellow through it, and he seemed to be looking up for tidings. Suddenly, the small pioneers dropped down, and lodged themselves on either side-fin of the shark, which turned off a-head, crossing to windward between the *Astræa* and the *Buffalo*, like a timid consort that had hoisted in her boats, and taken the safest station. Then, as the eye passed on alongside of the ships at hand, it caught the various shapes of other such monsters, each coming slowly from its special ship, or with wet back-fin cutting farther off through

the level glitter of the water; till, with one accord, as if deserting the fleet, they seemed to join in one body, and pass away clear of danger.

The same horror that passed through the lad's veins appeared to move the sailor. "Are they gone?" Henry asked.

"Gone!" said Jackson, grimly, through his set teeth—"not they, the ——s! No, sir; I've heard the same thing afore, though I ne'er seed it till now—not havin' went into action in the Tropics. Them and the *French* sharks is gone to join company, which it's the surest sign of hot work betwixt the fleets. Bless ye, sir, them devils makes peace at such a time, if no other. They goes shares, it's said, all regular."

There streamed out from the vice-admiral's peak two small flags, with a black ball between, repeated by the signal-frigate, answered by every ship. The *Astræa*, too, responded.

Suddenly came the deep voice of Captain Herbert below, the louder one of the first-lieutenant, the sharp passing along of the words by others. "All hands clear ship for action; beat to quarters!" And the tap and rattle of the drummers, hard and dull, sounded through the ship. An older man came up to relieve Jackson at his post—a veteran as steady of sight as he, and if not still so keen-eyed, at all events less indispensable on the main-deck.

Following Henry Spencer while he hurried

down, Jackson said on the way past, "No offence, Mr. Spencer; but bein' seldom a man can make so free—there's a brother o' my own in the collieries at Kingswood—Joseph Myers is his right name; an' as things stands, in case aught goes wrong with *my* number o' the mess, why, mayhap, sir, you'd see to't a bit? There's the twelvemonth's pay already, an' that. Joe, he knows my mind on it all. You'll be writin' home, it's like, sir?"

"Yes, Jackson—yes, it's near Bristol; I'll keep it in mind," said Harry, with a strong emotion. "Before then, though, Bob, you'll tell me more, Bob. You can't write, yourself, perhaps?"

Turning to the thronged main-hatchway, Jackson shook his head in the negative. "No more can Joe, sir, either," he said. "It's them desperate colliery accidents that's the worst of it; there an't none on 'em very bad of late about Kingswood, is there, sir? You'd a heer'd, it's likely, if there was."

"Certainly—not a doubt of it; I'd have heard, Jackson. No, there's nothing of the sort—nothing whatever," affirmed Harry, with decisive confidence; and made his way aft to the quarter-deck, where his place was. The station here assigned him made his heart leap proudly, with even a stranger thrill of pleasure. He did not then in the least envy Coventry's charge of the signals,—for his own was on the weather-ladder of the poop,

where, high above, stood the captain—Sir Richard himself—with eye bent forward on the meeting fleets. Mr. Holmes's separate post below, as he kept the whole length of the ready main-deck under his eye, required thus the use of an intermediate *aide-de-camp* as quick, as zealous, yet as cool, as the cockpit mess could furnish. So fearless felt Harry now—so cool, so sustained and calm—as to wonder why it had ever been otherwise for a moment. Only he felt very eager too, to have it all begun.

Grudgingly favoured by the afternoon wind, and coldly aided by Count D'Estaing's nonchalant approximation, the impatient Admiral Byron had crowded sail till he bore down athwart the other's course. With his whole column of ships—nineteen line-of-battle, one two-decked forty-four, and the forty-four-gun frigate—he might then even have crossed and stopped the Frenchman's superciliously-looking progress, which roused every manly heart to behold; but for the risk of either being divided in two by a whole line of twenty-five, or of producing otherwise a confusion most unprecedented in tactics. Not to mention the chance of being then separated from his transports in convoy, he might thus lose—dire thought to the active tactician of that day!—the much-prized *weather-gage* itself. Instead of which, his flag-ship no sooner reached the vicinity desired, than, luffing to the wind again, and shortening sail, she broke off in a direction to

pass reversely and slowly abreast of the French fleet, as it came up on the opposite tack; each British ship turning duly when she forged into his wake, to follow the grim example. Van toward van—still slanted from each other as the breeze required,—the fleets thus mutually began to overlap within long range of their artillery. Two vast moving walls they were, wafted from either horizon, that with one accord broke midway into volleyed flame, and cloud, and thunder, as the wind still urged them separate on their respective courses.

First flew the quick sheet of flame from *La Redoutable*, the leading eighty-gun ship of Count D'Estaing, whose smoke blew back about her as she ranged past; seen through it, even at that distance, she seemed to quiver in return, from the reserved broadside of the ninety-gun ship she had assailed—though it was but half-delivered, gun-by-gun, as the admiral bore sliding on across the gap that followed, to crush the hasty fire of the *Jeanne d'Arc*. A spar of his own fore-topmast fell, and his jib flew loose and tattered for some moments; but on into the cloudy volume of her course, the *Princess Charlotte* appeared to beat down the hostile fire as she passed near and nearer. Next astern of her was the *Fame*, seventy-four; the *Magnificent* and *Conqueror*, *Albion*, *Elizabeth*, *Suffolk*, and *Royal Oak*, followed with others of the same rate, for the most part exchanging shot

on equal terms with their opponents, who in ceaseless succession shifted by. Meantime, as either fleet made its contrary way through the water, under short fighting-canvas, at the rate of three or four knots an hour—their joint speed being about seven—the vessels thus severally received each other's fire but for a minute, allowing for the gaps between. Hence there was little of that special and lively enmity which seamen gather against particular ships. Scarce had the *Fame* and *Jeanne d'Arc* swept by each other, with half-empty batteries, ere, as they loaded, the crews saw fresh figure-heads push through the smoke; the angry men at the lee bow-guns of the *Magnificent* peered along the muzzles and saw, as the *Connétable de Bourbon* drove into the wake of *Le Caton* —which had knocked away their jib-boom last minute—how the crop-headed fellows looked with their leathery faces out of her weather bridle-port, puffing viciously at their ready port-fire, but owning by involuntary gestures how quickly the previous damage was being repaired. Soon, indeed—still moving their opposite ways—both lines were all but completely parallel, and for one smoke-wrapped minute might have been thought to pause there, as the breeze itself seemed lost:—van against rear, ship with ship, to have it out fairly to the end. The *Astræa*, behind all, still saw and heard it from without the whirling cover; here and there to windward a blue flag borne high,—clear of all, the *Bedford*-

shire's first signals still apparent: close a-head, by dint of extra sail, even the devoted *Buffalo* kept her luff nobly, then, as the well-battered *Redoutable* emerged abeam, flashed her fresh guns against Count D'Estaing himself—quick yet not premature, nor too simultaneous, well-aimed, too, though feeble at that interval; while, with little injury as yet, she vanished into closer hazard from the Count's successors.

So deafening the roar and crash, the obscurity so eclipse-like, into which the frigate slipped with a hushing ripple along the *Buffalo's* wake—that when Sir Richard Herbert raised his hand, with an eye upon Count D'Estaing's shrouded fore-top-sail, and turned toward Mr. Holmes below, neither word nor sign that followed could well have been certain—save for Harry Spencer's service. "Ready forward! Fire!"—words with whose transmission to be honoured at that moment, was dignity indeed —"*Hold on* with the guns amidships!" (To the quartermaster by the wheel, "luff—luff a little, no higher! Steady there.") "*Aft*, as the swell lifts her, ready. From No. 6 *aft*, as they bear—*fire!*"

As the *Astræa* blazed into the hellish chaos, her first few heavy shot seemed telling unexpectedly on the huge *Redoutable;* ere the last full thunder of Count D'Estaing was hurled back at her, she had slid half along one of her buoyant heaves, and rose quartering to the dregs of that furious volley —then, balancing some moments there, pitched gun

by gun her weightiest metal off the swell into his after-rigging. With the blowing vapour of the strife, he was gone, crippled of the only spar lost by him that day—it was only the French who were purposely aiming high, as their custom had now grown; and the frigate, when borne next athwart the second three-decker, caught but here and there aloft some random shot, back out of the blinding fire she levelled at them. Shadowy mass after mass they came, though: on, on into closer peril the *Astræa* held—the dim stern-frame of the *Buffalo* at times seeming crushed into smoke a-head, again about to shatter in the fierce light it reflected. Already had one heavy round-shot sung so close over Harry's head, that the mere wind of it, had he been full-grown, would have been mortal. By turns the crash of spars, the ripping of canvas, aloft, was hard to endure and still keep cool; part of the wreck of that poor unfortunate mizen-top-mast (damaged before in the hurricane off the Bahamas) fell on a sudden, making a dint in the deck by his very feet, which undoubtedly would have settled him had it been a yard nearer: and the thought had scarce passed his mind, that it was long odds against the same things happening *twice* at present, ere another spinning twenty-four-pounder came ricocheting in from the top of the swell—whistled close past Sir Richard's very place —glanced off the mizen-mast, and took away a

brass stanchion of the bulwarks as if it had been gingerbread, flying out again before it was ever seen. At that moment the boy's ghastly look met the eye of his captain, who bent it narrowly upon him, and catching his expression of intense relief and joy, smiled a smile never to be forgotten —for its kind graciousness of meaning, mixed with something involuntarily painful. But there was not an instant's time then to think: space by space, no doubt, the French ever followed each other slower, and slanted wider off to clear the rear of the smoke that troubled them, so, happily, favouring the *Buffalo* and *Astræa*. Not for the duration of a heart-beat, nevertheless, did the roar of battle cease; with its distracting crash and confusion, struck through at intervals by some dull thump or ringing shock and splinter—joined to a sudden inarticulate yell of agony, or deep groan that bubbled out and stopped; amidst all which, one might as well have run below, as try to understand a whit beyond his small part of the business.

Wrapped in the sulphurous canopy, all signals at an end then, the strife drove either way, heaving and washing on: above and below, straining breathless, half-stripped, savage, at the guns that by turns were run out loaded, or came recoiling in with the shudder of the ship—with here and there a rope on deck to show to the puzzled marines, or a sail to give heed to aloft,—a gun's-crew thrown short

of hands on the main-deck, or a sudden bustle carrying some one down from the spar-deck—Maclean the absent surgeon's-mate much missed below, in spite of all his faults—and Little Blakely running here and there from Mr. Holmes, like an urchin whose life was charmed—and through the stifling after-hatchway one lurid glimpse of Malabaster, the American, bringing water in a hat to Diamond and Jackson as they sweated at the big black breech of old *Pincher*. Which of the last three was blackest, thirstiest-looking, most dangerous to view, were hard to say; unless it were Jackson, with his hairy naked sinews like a bronze gladiator, a handkerchief about his head, and—still spattered over him—some hideous marks from a messmate's fate, who, lately busy by his side, had been cut almost in two by a chain-shot, and laid away under cover at hand. Little else was seen of the horror and terrible grandeur that people fancy: patches of the water heaved convulsive by between, dun and greenish beneath the hanging smoke—from the bowels of the smoke came turning out odd rainbow-hues, which shivered into flame and steam next moment; and high over its fresh white puffs and curls, like imps in the clouds at the Last Day, peered distant groups of sky-blue French *matelots* aiming their muskets from behind the unhurt sails as they floated past, or nests of grass-green chasseurs safely sharp-shooting out of the round-tops.

Again, a sudden break off the keen sunlight would fall in, showing that most of the *Buffalo's* masts still stood; her bellied main-topsail serving yet, though even more riddled and tattered than the frigate's—nay, they were coolly bending a new one *forward*, so as to avert the utter destruction to both ships which must have ensued, had she lost way for a moment. As it was, during that perilous half-hour which carried them almost clear of the French line, the *Astræa's* loss of life was slight—the damage to her hull trifling; the very injuries aloft were smaller than might have been expected, owing in great part to the screen of smoke to leeward, the continued rate of motion on both sides toward opposite points, and the enemy's systematic design to cripple rather than fairly meet Admiral Byron.

It was but half-an-hour or so from the time of commencing action, when the worthy admiral shot clear of his last antagonists—the four two-deckers by which his force was outnumbered, and whose fire was almost utterly crushed by his parting compliment, followed by those of that splendid new seventy-four, the *Fame*, and of the grand old *Magnificent*, swimming out astern of him to the sun and air. Already, far behind, against a sky as quiet, *La Redoutable*, *La Jeanne d'Arc*, *Les Caton*, and *Connétable de Bourbon*, were floating free the other way, upon the deep-blue westerly swell. Peace had settled at either van; midway, even,

the engagement ceased amidst its scattering wreaths; rear only battered rear as they drew off each other reversely, hidden in the dust that whirled round both, like the tails of two mighty serpents uncoiling from useless strife. Scarce hurt aloft, the French fleet shone out all taunt and gallant yet—the British bore forth a hacked and ragged array, with tangled gaps amidst it; which contrasted bitterly enough to the eye of the Honourable John Byron, as the sun-steeped vapours gave here and there, to Count D'Estaing's would-be farewell, a starry and rayed splendour. The Atlantic's wide undulation, with a dull-blue stare and a long rolling sudden glitter, seemed about to wash them thus apart beyond hope of settlement: northward, doubtless, the peaks of Granada stood open now to the vice-admiral, over the haze of St. George's Bay, for which the Count could hardly venture to beat up and contend again. True, too—as afterwards was proved — on the twenty-five battered decks of the French fleet, crowded the hour before with troops as well as numerous crews, lay now 1200 dead, while 1500 wounded were moaning below in their various cockpits and sick-bays: against which, even by the end of the day, there were but 183 British killed, with casualties 346. The expense in wood, canvas, and et ceteras, might be with his Britannic Majesty, George III.; yet certainly the disadvan-

tage would thus soon have lain with King *Louis Seize* of France.

In this manner, however, the piteous action was not destined to finish. The upper-deck of Count D'Estaing had not so much as got time to be cleared, rough-washed, and disincumbered of what was due to the sharks; the smoke of the last explosion was just blowing off toward the light cloud or two that floated above, exhaling into the tropical blaze of the sky (like the common soul of those 1200 and of those 183 also, waiting to join amity, and to swear peace for ever). The French rear being led by a substantial sixty-four, bearing the flag of a Contre-amiral who had suffered heavily from the last terrible broadside of the *Princess Charlotte* (*M. le Baron de la Touche de Tour*, of fiery Gascon blood), — the half-dismantled *Buffalo* now passed him in the distance, still duly blazing at each foe she descried—and might have drawn clear of all without much further damage, but for an unlucky hit received aloft by the *Monmouth*, sixty-four, her next a-head. The *Monmouth*, drifting to leeward, yet letting fall her fore-course, passed the last Frenchman near enough to surprise him disagreeably as they bade adieu, the two being of equal force. To crown which, the *Buffalo* succeeded right astern, and that with such apparent prospects of compelling the *fleur-de-lis* to be hauled down, as might have been perhaps justified in other circumstances. It was then

that the rage of the *Contre-amiral* in advance was displayed. All at once, luffing up from his course, he absolutely left his own line on its forward way, and tacked about in the smoke—so as to repay the bold aggression by a most unexpected and crushing fire, joined by his injured consort in rear. For a few hot minutes, in fact, not the drifting *Monmouth* only, but the completely disabled *Buffalo*, and the frigate also, appeared forgotten by their own by-passed line; but the available condition of the *Astræa*, her matchless working-qualities and prime crew, enabled her then to play an essential part. At close quarters, her heavy carronades told severely on the Baron; whom she slowly raked through his very stern-windows, then, flying about on the other tack, gave him the whole opposite broadside abeam as he sheered round,—a storm of iron that shook herself as she gave it; making Harry Spencer hold his breath for the fierce echo of the words he had conveyed. The fiery Contre-amiral, it proved, however, had committed the slight practical mistake attributed by Sir Charles Douglas to the French, of lumbering up the battery opposite to that prepared for general action; so that he now perforce ranged past in sullen silence to rejoin his line. Better yet, the action thus promised to be renewed in more decisive style; Count D'Estaing, from his van backwards to the centre, had tacked in the distance, and, failing to manœuvre between the

British fleet and its squadron of transports, now altogether wheeled, with apparent resolve to close upon the same course as they. He now offered a most tempting attitude of defiance: his whole available line closing up in the compactest order, then actually heaving-to about a mile distant, to leeward still; like combatants whose blood, when drawn upon so profusely, was but the more up at last. To leave no question of their meaning, the two ships that had suffered seriously were taken in charge by their cruisers beyond; a single gun was fired to windward, while, stripped to their topsails, with flags and ensigns displayed, they seemed to wait Admiral Byron's pleasure.

There was nothing earthly that could have tallied better with the notions of that hardy and long-tried veteran, so often hitherto the sport of fortune and the weather. Fortune appeared at length to have tricked the skilful Count into rashness, and delivered him into the stout hands of a more honest, though less original strategist. The very weather itself bade fair to be ere long of that sort which suited the latter, if not of the exact pattern which had favoured him of old; for the heavy cannonading, that for a time ate out the breeze's heart, had already partly caused its usual after-draught, promising a squall before the sun-down: a rippled liveliness now came black-blue along the weather horizon, hollowing out half the sultry air. Even before the French

offer met his view, he, on the other hand, to prevent their aims upon his convoy, had tacked in succession too, though from his rear. He now bore up at once before the wind, forming the "line close abreast," and squaring topsails, to come bow-on within close-quarters of the gallant D'Estaing. The *Astræa*, with the helpless *Buffalo's* hulk in tow, having been signalled to join the convoy astern, merely watched the issue as she plied her task under full sail to windward.

At their very longest range, the French opened a precipitate but irregular fire; which, though kept up, boded ill for their chances against an attack so grimly bent on laying alongside, so silently meant for broadside work, for tackling ship with ship, and boarding, and cold steel and falling colours. It was pitiable to see the good spars reel and topple, no doubt; to watch the very smoke oozing out through the rent canvas, and the spitting of the high musketry from beyond at the men aloft, who had the damages to attend to. But this was soon over; and, swiftly coming to the wind with one accord, the lofty British line blocked round, sheered in against the mountains of French smoke, and, with nineteen thundering broadsides in a breath, drove their gleam and fume together under it—like lava from Vesuvius, like fire and wind upon the reeling forests, like the first long flash of a hurricane. Magnificent even to see, it drew from

all hands in the wistful *Astræa* a premature cheer, at which Mr. Holmes yet forgot to frown; Sir Richard himself leaning bare-headed out to make it sure; the very *Buffalo* heartily echoing it. Lost in a mile of cloud, the fleet heaved obscurely on the swell beneath it. The pause was scarce broken next minute by the dropping and uncertain fire returned against the breeze. Through the tumultuous vapour rising to the sun, sails hovered here and there, colours seemed to fall or mount, shivered masts leapt glaring together—out of tangled rigging, ladder against ladder,—as if the battle already grew too close for noise.

"Now—now, by the Lord Harry! Give it 'em again, old boy—pitch it in! They can't long stand such doses, I'd say!" So holloaed the tall midshipman, Coventry, on the fore-topgallant-yard of the *Astræa*. As if Vice-Admiral Byron could have heard, or, hearing, were likely to act according to the injunctions of the tall midshipman.

"There goes the *Royal Oak* again, then! There's the *Magnificent!* Now the *Fame*—go it!" Thus squeaked a smaller reefer, hanging below, and waving his cap. Mr. Burt, the master's-mate, with a good glass at his eye, was seated on the contiguous cross-trees, steadfastly watching the progress of matters; while below, and in the rigging and tops of the other masts, were other young

gentlemen, with the usual topmen at their stations.

"Lord! what's that? what's up? what the deuce is the meaning of *that*, eh?" suddenly exclaimed Coventry from above, as he shaded his eyes and stared at the engagement; while the smoke was dispersing and clearing away on either hand, beyond the distinct rigging of the British line. The fire of the enemy had ceased altogether: and as the shade rose from the swelling water, on that one extremity by which they had outflanked the British, it showed nothing but an empty space where the sea flickered through broken smoke-wreaths. Dimly standing off beyond range, under full topsails, could by degrees be discovered the rear of the French line, while the centre and van soon showed their highest pinnacles still farther away, as the British guns ceased to pour out their contents. They had evidently taken advantage, in the most ingenious way, of the cover of their own smoke from windward: as a screen behind which quietly to retire. This, however, after inflicting the utmost possible damage on the attacking line; all whose resolute self-control was thus thrown away, like the broadsides that were hurled into a mere curtain of cloud. A few minutes served to dissolve the latter before breeze and sun: then was plainly seen again, a full mile off as before,

the whole French fleet hove-to in regular order, firing another solitary defiant gun to windward.

The *Astræa's* attentive midshipmen gaped with surprise: Coventry turned downward to his friend, young Spencer, with a look of absolute disgust and indignation, making a speechless motion of his clenched fist as if to hit Count D'Estaing in a vital part: a groan, hiss, and growl of execration ran through the various stations aloft; roughly blended, among the men, with some emphatic oaths and curses, one or two fairly spitting their contempt in a ceremonious way upon the nearest place of safe deposit. Mr. Burt still gazed steadily through his glass, till he was hailed from the quarter-deck below, with a question or two.

"The flag and leading ships are repairing damages, sir," he said. "It's the seven rear ships," he added, in answer to the next inquiry, "with the Rear-admiral leading, sir—that has filled and stood on. They're rather a little confused, just now, sir."

Again the French line began to fire, curling the white and grey-blue vapours round them in the breeze, against which came heavily rolling up the deep report of the ordnance, breaking singly one into the other, or bursting like an explosion; and again the square English canvas crowded against it, zealously pressing on. The English

ships even began this time to increase sail and divide their force; in an apparent disorder that nevertheless promised to bring them better to the goal, although the French should repeat the same stratagem. But the British vice-admiral, with the signal for recal hoisted at his three-decker's mastheads, thundered out first one summons to attention, then another, from two of the heaviest of his lower-deck guns (forty-two's). Ship by ship was seen to exhibit the signal in reply, and to haul up close on the other tack for return: Rear-Admiral Hyde Parker had already lost two topmasts: others, even at a distance, betrayed similar injuries. Far off, once more, reappeared the long French battle-array, as serried and as perfect to remote view as ever; a third time hove-to with backed main-topsails, a third time firing a signal weather-gun in challenge, and a third time waiting for the onset, as if its perpetual series were only to end with the rigging of their enemies. But the fight was over. Vice-Admiral Byron could no longer pursue, if he had wished it, unless with his four or five uncrippled ships; in so lamentable a state had many of his principal spars and sails been placed. And in an hour more, the French fleet—whose heavy loss of men was of course concealed from all hostile knowledge—was seen to brace round its twenty-five main-topsails again in unison, to glide forward in the stateliest serenity, and finally haul up to wind-

ward: gaining at last the weather-gage itself, of which, whether with or without their consent, the morning had deprived them. For all the purposes of Count D'Estaing's able tactics, indeed, it seemed as if the *lee-gage* suited him better still. He had lost men, but had disabled a fleet in turn: the harbour of St. George's Bay, which Admiral Byron could not now expect to force, was securer than before to King *Louis Seize:* and Granada, like St. Vincent's, must still disgracefully remain for the present in French hands.

Gradually, in long-drawn train, the enemy thus faded into the sunset; in double column, as before, they darkened hull-down against its sudden glories, steering for the captured island. While, with the very emptiest name of triumph over superior force, the British vice-admiral was left to preserve St. Lucia and Barbadoes; which possessions, certainly, had been threatened too.

END OF VOL. II.

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